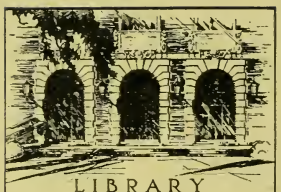

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MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

The Romance of a Wreck

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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MY SHIPMATE LOUISE

CHAPTER XV

A SINGULAR PLOT

It speedily ran amongst us of the cuddy that the dead sailor who had been so very impressively interred by old Keeling had returned to the ship, and was alive in some part of her, secure in handcuffs or in leg-irons; but so much was made of the fire which had broken out that Crabb's reappearance lost as a miracle half the weight it would have carried had it happened alone. Besides, the sense of the people soon gathered that the business was a plot which had been managed with astonishing cleverness, and it all seemed plain as mud in a wine-glass when the whisper went round that Hemmeridge was under arrest as an arch-conspirator in the matter. And certainly it made one feel far from comfortable even to

think that for the past weeks a ruffian of a true piratical complexion had been secreted in the ship's hold, where his confederates would keep him supplied with tobacco and the means of lighting it, and where, in his borings and pryings, he was tolerably certain to have stumbled upon something inflammatory in the shape of spirits. Indeed, it made me draw my breath short when my mind went to the rum puncheons and the powder-magazine below, and to the vision of Crabb, drunk, stupidly groping with a naked light in his hand, during some midnight hour, maybe, when we were all in bed.

However, the imagination of the passengers would hardly go to these lengths. Their thoughts held to the fire, and their talk chiefly concerned it. When the skipper came below for a glass of grog that night, the ladies so baited him with questions that one pitied him almost for not being able to enjoy the privilege of venting his heated soul in a few strong words.

'I *cannot* satisfy myself, Captain Keeling, that the fire is utterly extinguished,' said Mrs. Bannister.

'Might it not burst out again, capting?'

cried Mrs. Hudson. 'There should be plenty of pails kept filled with water ready to empty if smoke is smelt.'

'Perhaps something may be on fire even now!' exclaimed Mrs Joliffe, 'something that doesn't make a smoke; and how *then* are the sailors to tell if all is right in the bottom of the ship?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried Mrs. Trevor, 'is it quite safe to go to bed, do you think?'

'If a fire should break out,' said Miss Hudson in a trembling voice, as though shudder after shudder were chasing through her, 'how can we depend upon being called? It is impossible to hear downstairs what is going on on deck.'

Poor old marline-spike made a bolt of it at last, fairly turning tail and rushing up the companion steps when it came to the colonel striking in and topping off the female broadsides by inquiries of a like nature delivered at the very height of his pipes.

However, the night passed quietly; and when next morning came and the people assembled at breakfast, all fear of fire was seemingly gone, and little more was talked about than Crabb and what his designs had

been, the topic gathering no mean accentuation from the doctor's vacant place. Somewhere about ten o'clock I was standing at the taffrail watching the ship's wake, that was languidly streaming off in a short oily surface, and wondering whether, if we were to fall in with nothing brisker than these faint airs and draughts of wind, all hands would not have grown white-haired and decrepit by the time we were up with the Cape, leaving the Indian Ocean and Bombay out of consideration, when the head-steward came up to me.

'Captain Keeling's compliments, sir, and he'll feel greatly hobliged, providing you're not hotherwise occupied, by your stepping to his cabin, sir.'

'Oh yes, with pleasure,' said I. 'Is he alone?'

'He is not, sir.'

I went down the companion steps, knocked at the captain's door, and entered. It was a roomy interior, a very noble ship's berth, occupying hard upon the width of the deck right aft, saving, as I have before described, a sort of small chart-room alongside, bulkheaded off. There was a large stern window, after the olden fashion, with the blue line of the horizon

gently sliding up and down it, and a shivering light lifting off the sea to the glass, sharp and of a sort of azure brilliancy, as though from diamonds set a-trembling. Keeling, in full fig, his face showing of a dark red against some maple-coloured ground of bulkhead or ship's side, was seated at a table. He instantly rose on my entering, gave me one of his wire-drawn bows, and motioned me to a seat, thanking me in a few words for coming. On the starboard hand stood Crabb and the sailmaker, handcuffed, and on either side of them was a seaman with a cutlass dangling at his hip. On the port hand sat Dr. Hemmeridge, his legs crossed, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his head drooped. He was deadly pale, and looked horribly ill and worried. Near him was one of the sailors, a young fellow of some seven or eight and twenty, with a quantity of hair falling over his brow, a straggling beard, and small black eyes, which roamed swiftly in glances charged methought with the spirit of mutiny and menace and defiance. Mr. Prance was at the captain's elbow; and the third mate was seated at an end of the table with a pen in his hand and some paper in front of him.

I bowed to Hemmeridge, but he took no notice. Until the captain addressed me, I stared hard at Crabb ; for even now, with the ugly ruffian standing before me, my mind found it difficult to realise that he was alive ; that the creature I gazed at was the man whom all hands of us, with an exception or two, supposed overboard a thousand fathoms deep. There was, besides, the fascination of his ugliness. The hunch-like curve of his back, his little blood-stained eyes looking away from his nose, as though they sought to peer at something at the back of his head, the greasy trail of carroty hair upon his back, the fragment of nose over his hare-lip, these and the rest of him combined into the representation of the most extravagantly grotesque, ill-favoured figure ever witnessed outside the bars of a menagerie. The sailmaker's face was as white as one of his bolts of canvas, but it wore a determined look, though I noticed a quivering in the nostrils of his high-perched nose, and a constant uneasy movement of the fingers, as of dying hands plucking at bedclothes.

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed old Keeling with the dignity and gravity of a judge, 'I've taken

the liberty to send for you, as I am informed by Mr. Prance that when that man there'—inclining his head towards Crabb without looking at him—'was lying, as it was supposed, dead in his bunk, you accompanied Mr. Hemmeridge, the ship's surgeon'—here he indicated the doctor with a motion of his head but without looking at him either—'into the forecastle, and stood for some considerable time surveying the so-called corpse.'

'That is quite true,' said I.

'Did Mr. Hemmeridge expose the man's face to you?'

'He did.'

'What impression was produced upon your mind by the sight of the—of the—body?'

Crabb gave a horrible grin.

'That he was stone-dead, Captain Keeling; so stone-dead, sir, that I can scarcely credit the man himself is now before me.'

Hemmeridge looked up and fixed his eyes upon me.

'It is but reasonable I should inform you, Mr. Dugdale,' continued old marline-spike, 'that Mr. Hemmeridge is under arrest on suspicion of conspiring with Crabb, with Willett, and with Thomas Bobbins'—he glanced at the

man who stood next to the doctor—'to plunder the ship. Bobbins has given evidence that leaves me in no doubt as to the guilt of Crabb and Willett.'

Crabb uttered a curse through his teeth, accompanied with a look at the young seaman, in the one-eyed gleam of which murder methought was writ too large to be mistaken for any other intention. Old Keeling did not heed him.

'Bobbins's story,' he continued, 'is to this effect: that Crabb was to swallow a potion which would produce the appearance of death; that the sailmaker was to have a hammock weighted, shaped, and in all respects equipped to resemble the one in which Crabb would be stitched up: that in the dead of night, when the ship was silent, and the deck forward vacant, the sham hammock was to be placed upon the fore-hatch by the sailmaker and Bobbins, and the cover containing that man' —inclining his head at Crabb—'conveyed into the sailmaker's cabin, where it was to be cut open, the man freed, and secreted in the berth till consciousness had returned, and he was in a fit state to seize the first opportunity of sneaking into the hold. All this was done,'

old Keeling went on, Mr. Prance meanwhile looking as grave as an owl over the skipper's shoulder, whilst every now and again a hideous grin would distort Crabb's frightful mouth, though the sailmaker continued to stare at the captain with a white and determined countenance, and Hemmeridge to listen with a frowning worried look, his leg that crossed the other swinging like a pendulum. 'The man Crabb got into the hold, was supplied with food and drink by Willett and Bobbins, and with tools to enable him to break into the mail-room'——

'And I'd ha' done it too,' here interrupted Crabb in a voice like a saw going through a balk of timber, 'if it hadn't been for the stinking smoke of them blasted blankets.'

'This inquiry,' continued Keeling, 'now entirely concerns Mr. Hemmeridge. You tell me, Mr. Dugdale, that Crabb seemed to you as a stone-dead man.'

'The devil himself couldn't ha' told the difference,' bawled Crabb. '*He's* not in it,' insolently motioning with his elbow towards the doctor. 'Wouldn't that blooming Bobbins ha' said so?' and he darted another murderous glance at the hairy young sailor.

'I can assure you, Captain Keeling,' said I, 'that the man was perfectly dead. There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that Mr. Hemmeridge was fully convinced the body was a corpse. Convinced, captain, but dissatisfied too; and perhaps,' said I, with a glance at Crabb, 'it is a pity for more sakes than one that he did not carry out his idea of a post-mortem examination.'

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Hemmeridge in a low, deep, trembling voice, 'before God and man, I am innocent; and I hope to live to call Captain Keeling to account for this monstrous slander, this enormous suspicion, this dishonourable and detestable accusation.'

'I've never heered,' said the man named Bobbins, in a long-drawn whining voice, 'that this gent was consarned. I remembered Crabb asking what was to be done if so be the surgeon should cut him up to see what he died of, and Mr. Willett kissed the Bible afore Crabb and me to this: that if the surgeon made up his mind to open Crabb, Willett was to show him the bottle of physic, and to tell him that Crabb had took it for some bad complaint, and that, though he might look dead, he worn't so.'

Crabb hove a fearful curse at the man. The bushy-whiskered sailor who guarded him on the right significantly put his hand upon the hilt of his cutlass whilst he said something to him under his breath.

'This is new to me,' exclaimed Keeling, screwing his eye gimlet-fashion into the face of Bobbins, and then letting it drop, as if satisfied. 'Mr. Hemmeridge, I have *suspected* you, sir; but it's a little soon for you to talk of my having *accused* you. You are a medical man. If anybody knows death by looking upon it you should. Yet, though this man Crabb is merely counterfeiting death, you come aft to me and report him dead! What am I to infer? Your ignorance or your guilt, sir?'

'Captain Keeling,' cried I, 'believe me when I promise you the man was not *counterfeiting* death. He was to all intents and purposes a corpse. How was this brought about? Surely by no exercise of his own art. The look of the eye—the droop of the jaw—the hue of the skin—Captain Keeling, it was death to the sight: no counterfeit—an effect produced by something much more powerful than the effort of such a will as that man has;' and I pointed with my thumb at Crabb, who

told me with a curse to mind my own business.

'Mr. Dugdale, I thank you,' said Hemmeridge, bowing to me.

Captain Keeling held up a long thin phial about three-quarters full of a dark liquor. I had not before noticed it.

'This has been produced,' said he, 'by the man Bobbins, who states that it is the stuff which Crabb swallowed, and which caused the death-like aspect you saw in him.' He put the bottle down; then clenching his fist, smote the table violently. 'I cannot credit it!' he cried. 'I cannot be imposed on. Am I to believe that there is any drug in existence which will produce in a living being the exact semblance of death?'

'Oh, I think so, sir,' said Prance, speaking mildly.

Hemmeridge sneered.

'A semblance of death,' roared old Keeling, twisting round upon his chief mate, 'capable of deceiving the eye—the practised eye of a medical man? You may give me a dose of laudanum, and I may look dead to you, sir, but not to Mr. Hemmeridge yonder. No, sir; I am not to be persuaded,' and here he brought

his fist down upon the table again. 'It is either gross ignorance or direct connivance, and I mean to be satisfied—I mean to sift it to the bottom—I mean to get at the truth, by ——!'

His face was full of blood, and he puffed and blew like a swimmer struggling for his life.

'You've got the truth, and be so-and-so to you,' broke in Crabb.

The armed sailor ground his elbow into the fellow's ribs.

'I am merely here to answer your questions, Captain Keeling,' said I, 'and must apologise for taking a single step beyond the object you had in calling me to you; but at least permit me to ask, cannot Mr. Hemmeridge explain the nature of the drug contained in that bottle?'

'I do not know what it is,' exclaimed Hemmeridge.

'Suppose, sir,' said Mr Prance, 'we give Crabb another dose; then you'll be able to judge for yourself.'

'You don't give me no more doses!' said Crabb. 'Try it on yourselves.'

The captain sat a little, looking at me

vacantly, lost in thought. He suddenly turned to Hemmeridge.

'You are at liberty, sir; I remove the arrest.'

'And is that all?' exclaimed the other, after a brief pause, viewing him steadily. 'I must have an apology, sir; an apology ample, abundant, satisfying.'

'I will see you'—began old Keeling, then checked himself. 'You can leave this cabin, sir.'

Hemmeridge rose from his chair. 'I leave this cabin, sir,' said he, 'and I also leave my duties. Professionally, I do no more in this ship, sir. You have disgraced, you have dishonoured me. But,' said he, shaking his finger at him, 'you shall make me amends at Bombay, sir—you shall make me amends at Bombay!'

He stalked from the cabin, old Keeling watching him with a frown, but in silence.

'Captain,' I exclaimed, rising as the door closed behind the doctor, 'I am persuaded that Mr. Hemmeridge is innocent of all participation in this bad business. You have on board a gentleman who, I believe, has a very extensive knowledge of drugs and herbs and

the like—I mean Mr. Saunders. It is just possible he might know the nature of the contents of that bottle.'

Keeling reflected a minute, and then said: 'Mr. Prance, send my compliments to Mr. Saunders, and ask him to my cabin.'

The mate went out; I was following him.

'Pray, stay a little, Mr. Dugdale,' said the skipper.—'Men, take those fellows forward.—Remain where you are,' he added, turning to Bobbins.

A seaman flung open the door, and Crabb and the sailmaker passed out, followed by the second armed sailor, who silenced some blasphemous abuse that Crabb had paused to deliver, by giving him a shove that drove him headlong into the cuddy.

'I am sorry to detain you, Mr Dugdale,' said the captain. 'Mr Saunders is a rather nervous gentleman, and it might be agreeable to him to find you here.'

'You do not detain me, Captain Keeling. This is an amazing business, almost too wonderful in its way to believe in. Have you ascertained how Crabb became possessed of that magical drug?—and magical it must be, captain, for I give you my word that never

showed any corpse deader than that fellow when Hemmeridge removed the canvas from his face.'

'I beg your honour's pardon,' exclaimed Bobbins, preserving his lamenting and whining voice, and knuckling his forehead as he spoke, whilst I could see old Keeling lifting his eyes to him with disgust and aversion strong in his purple countenance. 'Mr Willett told me that Crabb 'ud say he'd got that there stuff off a travelling Jew that he fell in with at some Mediterranean port. He bought two lots of it, and tried a dose on a man who took it unbeknown, reckoning it good for spasms. He believed as it had killed the chap, sich was his corpse-like swound; but he come to all right arter four-and-twenty hours, and niver knowed nothen about it, and believed it still to be Monday when it were Toosday. This put the scheme he tried on here into his head.'

'Has he ever attempted anything of the same sort before?' inquired Keeling.

'I dunno, sir. He's a bad un. It 'ud make a marble heffigy sweat to hear him talk in his sleep.'

There was a knock at the cabin door, and

Mr. Prance ushered in Mr. Saunders. The little chap looked very small as he entered, holding his large hat in his hand. He was pale, and stared up at us with something of alarm as we rose to his entrance, the skipper giving him the same hide-bound bow that he had greeted me with.

'Is Mr. Saunders acquainted with the story of this business, Mr. Prance?' old Keeling inquired.

'Yes, sir,' replied the mate. 'I gave him the substance of it in a few words as we came along.'

'It is extremely startling,' said the little man, climbing on to the chair into which old Keeling had waved him, and dangling his short legs over the edge as a small boy might.

'Your knowledge of drugs and medicines, Mr. Saunders, is, I believe, very considerable?' said the skipper. The little fellow bowed. 'This,' said Keeling, holding up the phial, 'is a drug, the stupefying effects of which, I am informed, are so remarkable that any one who takes it entirely loses animation, and presents such an aspect of death as will deceive the eye of the most expert medical practitioner. Is such a thing conceivable, Mr Saunders?'

The little man reflected very earnestly for some moments, with his eyes fixed upon Keeling. He then asked Mr. Prance to hand him the phial, which he uncorked, and smelt and tasted.

'I cannot be positive,' he exclaimed, with a slow, wise shake of his large head; 'but I strongly suspect this to be what is known as *morion*, the death-wine of Pliny and Dioscorides. Mr. Dugdale, observe the strange, peculiar faint smell—what does it suggest?'

I put the bottle to my nose and sniffed. 'Opium will it be, Mr. Saunders?'

'Just so,' he cried. 'Captain Keeling, smell you, sir.'

The old skipper applied the bottle to his nostrils and snuffled a little. 'I should call this a kind of opium,' said he.

'If,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders, 'it be morion, as I believe it is, it is made from the mandragora or mandrake of the kind that flourishes in Greece and Palestine and in certain parts of the Mediterranean seaboard.'

'But am I to understand,' said Keeling, 'that a dose of it is going to make a man look as dead as if he were killed?'

'The effect of morion,' responded Mr.

Saunders, 'is that of suspended animation, scarcely distinguishable from death.'

'Could it deceive a qualified man such as Dr. Hemmeridge?' demanded the skipper.

'I should think it very probable,' answered little Saunders cautiously; 'in fact, sir, as we have seen, he *was* deceived by the effects of that drug, be it morion or anything else.'

'You can go forward,' said the captain to Bobbins.

The fellow flourished a hand to his brow and left the cabin.

'Mr. Saunders, I am obliged to you, sir, for your information,' continued old Keeling. 'I trust to have your opinion confirmed either in Bombay or in London. To me it seems a very incredible thing. Mr. Dugdale, I thank you for the trouble you have given yourself to attend here.'

He bowed; and little Saunders and myself, accompanied by Mr. Prance, entered the cuddy.

'A most extraordinary business altogether,' cried the little man: 'it is wonderful enough, supposing the stuff to be morion, that a common sailor should be in possession of such

a drug; but much more wonderful yet that it should occur to him to employ it as an instrument in probably the most audacious project ever adventured on board ship.'

'Hemmeridge might have opened Crabb,' said I.

'Well, the rogue foresaw it, and provided against it, as we know,' exclaimed Mr. Prance. 'There is pocketable booty in the mail-room to the value of hard upon a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. A man like Crabb will run risks for such plunder, Mr. Dugdale. If the sailmaker had kept his word and produced the bottle to Hemmeridge, the doctor would have been pretty sure to stay his hand.'

'Why, likely as not,' I exclaimed: 'but tell me, Mr. Prance—that fellow Bobbins seems to have been coaxed very easily into peaching.'

'Ay,' said he; 'there'd been an ugly quarrel between him and Willett ten days ago. I believe the rascal would not have split whilst Crabb lay snug and secret in the hold, but on his showing himself, Bobbins took fright, thought of his neck, and being actuated besides by hatred of Willett, came forward and volunteered the whole yarn.'

'And how is he to be served?' inquired Mr. Saunders.

'Left to be at large, sir,' answered the mate; 'and punishment enough, too, as any one may suppose, of a false-hearted, lily-livered shipmate who has to swing his hammock three or four months among a forecastle full of hands. For my part,' added he with a laugh, 'if I were that miscreant, I'd rather be snug in irons along with Willett and the cast-eyed pirate, stowed safe out of sight.'

He entered his cabin, and Mr. Saunders and I stepped on to the quarter-deck.

CHAPTER XVI

WE SIGHT A WRECK

THE wonder and excitement raised in us by the extraordinary forecastle conspiracy to plunder the ship's mail-room passed away in two or three days. Monotony at sea is heavy and flattening. It passes over the soul as an iron roller over a lawn, and smoothes down every asperity of memory into the merest flatness of moods and humours. Hemmeridge showed himself no more. I never again saw him whilst I was in the *Countess Ida*. He lay hid in his cabin, where he was fed, by the captain's orders, from the cuddy table; but he refused to leave his berth, swore he would not prescribe so much as a pill though a pestilence should fall upon the whole ship's company, and virtually left us all without the means of obtaining professional advice. His part in Crabb's and the sailmaker's scheme was vehemently discussed, as you will suppose.

The colonel of course was without a shadow of a doubt of his guilt; but the rest of us, saving Mr. Johnson, who declined to give an opinion, considered him as wholly innocent.

Little Saunders gave himself a small air of importance as a person referred to by the captain on his knowledge of herbs, and strutted on the merits of his suspicion that the liquor was what he called morion. He took me into his cabin, and climbing into his bunk, produced a folio volume half the size of himself, with which he dropped upon the deck, hugging the book to his heart as though it were his wife.

'Here,' said he, opening the volume and pointing at it and looking up into my face, 'is an account of the growth out of which morion is extracted. That,' continued he, still pointing with a little forefinger and a long white nail, 'is a picture of the plant in flower. This is an illustration of the young fruit. Here is the ovary, and here is the stamen. It is, in short, the well known mandragora of Hippocrates. It consists of three or four species of stemless herbs, perennial,' said he, carrying his eyes to the book, 'and very hardy. Their roots are large and thick; and, as I told the

captain,' cried he with a little movement of triumph, and pointing to the sentence eagerly, 'it is an inhabitant of the Mediterranean parallels.'

And then the little chap read out a long description of the flowers of the mandrake, of the corolla and lobes, of the berries and leaves, and I know not what else besides, in all of which my ignorant ear could find nothing of the smallest interest.

He afterwards went with his big book to the skipper, who, Mr. Prance told me, was impressed, though he was not to be persuaded.

'He will not believe,' said the chief officer, 'that there can be any aspect in a living body to deceive a medical man into a belief that the person is dead. I said to him: "How about the folks that are buried alive, sir?" He answered: "They are unhappy wretches, whom ignorant and gross persons, calling themselves medical men, lightly glance at and pronounce dead, and hurry away from. Hemmeridge would know better, sir. He *does* know better. I cannot satisfy myself that he could not distinguish life in that man Crabb. And what's the inference then? No matter,

sir. I will have this thing gone closely into when we arrive at Bombay." Captain Keeling is an obstinate old sailor, Mr. Dugdale,' continued the mate. 'In truth, Hemmeridge is as innocent as you or I.'

Three days passed away. All this while the Indiaman was scarcely doing more than rippling through it. It was hard to realise that we were out in the mid-heart almost of one of old earth's mightiest oceans, so peaceful was the water, so still the heavens, so placid the dim sultry distances, where sky and sea were blended in a blue faintness, out of the north-west corner of which the light wind blew without power enough to swing the foot of the courses or to put a twinkle into the tall moon-coloured cloths of the topmast studding-sails.

It was a Monday morning, as very well indeed do I remember. I went on deck at about seven o'clock for a bath ; and on looking over the forecastle rail, down away upon the starboard bow I caught sight of something sparkling that might very well have passed for the reflection in the water of a brilliant luminary. The old Scotch carpenter was leaning against the forecastle capstan smoking

a pipe, his weather-hardened face of leather drooping over his folded arms.

'Pray, what is that object shining down there?' said I.

'Well, it puzzled me, sir,' he answered, slowly raising his head, and then leisurely staring in the direction of the appearance: 'It's naething mair nor less than a ship's hull, sir.'

By this time I was able to distinguish a bit clearer, and could trace, amid the delicate haze of silver glory that was hanging all over the sea that way, as it came in gushing and floating folds of magnificence from the sun that was already many degrees above the horizon, the outline of the hull of a small vessel, the proportions so faint as to be almost illusive. She was too far distant to exhibit much more than the mere flash she made, yet she was an object to constrain the attention in that wide blank shining calm of sea, and I lingered a little while looking at her, meanwhile yarning with the old carpenter about Crabb and the sailmaker and the incident of the fire, and such matters.

At breakfast there was some talk about this hull, and Mr. Emmett told the captain

that he hoped a shot would be sent at her, as who was to know but that another cargo of monkeys might be exorcised out of the fabric.'

'I should rather like to visit a wreck,' I heard Miss Temple say across the table to Mr. Colledge: 'I mean, of course, an abandoned vessel floating in the middle of the ocean.'

'I protest I would rather die than think of such a thing,' exclaimed her aunt.

'Well, I don't know,' said Colledge; 'it would be something to do and something to talk about. Did you ever board a wreck, Captain Keeling?'

'No, sir.'

'I would choose a wreck,' continued Miss Temple, in her clear, rich, somewhat trembling voice, but with an air that let you know she confined her speech to Mrs. Radcliffe and the young sprig opposite, and old marline-spike, as I love to call him, 'that had been abandoned for months, indeed for years, if such a thing could be: a hull covered with shells and weed and grass, into which the spirit of the enormous loneliness of the wide ocean had entered, so that you could get to think of her as a creation of the sea itself, as an uninhabited island is, or a noble seabird. Think,' she continued,

fixing her large dark eyes upon Colledge with a light, almost sarcastic smile flickering about her lips, as though she was perfectly sensible that her thoughts and language were a trifle taller than that honourable young gentleman's intellectual stature rose to—'think of being utterly alone during a long, breathless, moonlit night on board such a wreck as I am imagining. The stillness! the imaginations which would come shaping out of the shadows! By putting one's ear to the hatchway, as you sailors call it, Captain Keeling, what should one be able to hear?'

'The noise of water washing about below, ma'am—I don't see what else,' answered the old skipper, stiffening up his figure, whilst he adjusted his cravat, and gazing at her with a highly literal countenance over the points of his shirt collars.

She did not seem to hear him; her head had drooped, as though to a sudden engrossing thought, and her gaze rested upon something which her delicate fingers toyed with upon the table.

'What very odd fancies you have, Louise,' exclaimed Mrs. Radcliffe with a peck of her face at the girl's handsome profile.

'Rather a good subject for a descriptive article, Johnson,' exclaimed Emmett aside with a drawl.

'Or for a picture,' answered Johnson; 'better on canvas than on paper, I think; don't you, Mr Saunders? Calm sea—a moon up in the air—a wreck showing black against the white reflection under the planet—a haughty young lady'—here he softened his voice—'inclining her head to the fore-hatch with her hand to her ear.—A first-class idea, Emmett. Seize it, or it may occur to another man.'

Miss Temple was speaking again, but the rude imbecile jabber of the journalist prevented me from hearing her; and bestowing a sea-blessing on his head under my breath, I left the table and went on deck.

There was every promise of a dead calm anon. The sea looked like ice in places with the bluish glint of the brine that softened the lines and curves betwixt the crawlings of the air into a tender contrast for the lustrous azure of the water where it was touched by the wind. It was a high, hot, cloudless morning, the topmost canvas, white as milk, looking dizzy up in the blue, as though it trembled in

some sultry belt of atmosphere there. I went to the rail to view the wreck, and instantly made out on the other side of her the shining square of a sail—some ship on the rim of the horizon that had crawled into sight since six bells of the morning watch, and was now creeping down the smooth plain of sea with her yards braced somewhat forward, making a wind for herself out of what was scarce more than a catspaw to us, who had the thin fanning nearly over the stern.

Prance came up from the breakfast table with a telescope in his hand and stood by my side.

'That ship down yonder grows,' he exclaimed, pointing the glass and speaking with his eye at it; 'there'll be more air stirring down there than here; but little enough anywhere presently, though I tell you what, Mr Dugdale, there's drop enough in the mercury to inspire one with hope.'

He brought the telescope to bear upon the hull, and was silent for a few moments, whilst I waited impatiently for him to make an end, wanting to look too.

'I don't think I can be mistaken,' said he

presently in a musing voice: 'look you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'At what?' said I, as I took the glass from him.

'At the hull yonder.'

I put the telescope upon the rail and knelt to it. Points which were invisible to the naked sight were clear enough now. The wreck was that of a vessel of some two hundred and fifty tons. She sat very light or high upon the water, and it was a part of the copper that rose to her bends which had emitted the flash that caught my eye on the forecastle. Her foremast was standing, and her foreyard lay crossed upon it. Her bowsprit also forked out, but the jib-booms were gone. Lengths of her bulwark were smashed level to the deck; but gaunt as her mastless condition made her look, miserable as she showed in the mutilation of her sides, the beautiful shape of the hull stole out upon the sight through the deformities of her wrecked condition, as the fine shape of a woman expresses itself in defiance of the beggar's rags which may clothe her.

'By George, then, Mr Prance—why, yes, to be sure! I see what you mean,' I cried all

on a sudden—'that must be our buccaneering friend of the other day!'

'Neither more nor less,' said he; 'an odd rencontre certainly, considering what a big place the sea is. And yet I don't know: such a clipper will have sailed two feet to our one, though she exposed no more than her foresail. She'll have run as we did, and the light airs and baffling weather which followed will easily account for this meeting.'

'She is not yet the handful of charred staves you thought her, Mr Prance,' said I; 'they managed to get the fire under anyway, though they had to abandon the brig in the end. What is that fellow beyond her? She has the look of a man-of-war: a ship, I believe: yes, I think I can catch sight of the yards on the mizzen peeping past the sails on the main.'

All her canvas had risen, but nothing of her hull, saving the black film of her bulwark hovering upon the horizon with an icy gleam betwixt it and the sea-line, as though there was no more of her than that. When the others came on deck there was no little excitement amongst them on learning that the hull was neither more nor less than the veritable

wreck of the brig whose presence had filled us with alarm and misery a few days before. Glasses of all sorts were brought to bear upon her, and by this time it was to be ascertained without doubt that she was absolutely deserted; 'unless,' I heard Mr Emmett say to Mr. Prance, 'her people should be lying concealed within, hoping to coax us to visit her by an appearance of being deserted, when, of course, they would cut us off, and plunder our remains—I mean, those who would be fools enough to board her out of curiosity.'

'Likely as not,' Mr. Prance answered with a sour smile. 'I would advise you not to attempt to inspect her.'

'Not I,' answered the painter; and the chief officer turned abruptly from him to smother a laugh.

It was not long, however, before the delicate miracle of distant canvas shining past the hull upon the calm blue like some spire of alabaster was recognised as a man-of-war, not alone by the cut of her canvas and by other peculiarities aloft readily determinable by the seafaring eye, but by the chequered band upon her hull, that had mounted fair to the firm crystal-like rim of the ocean, and by the line of white

hammock-cloths that crowned her tall defences. She was some small corvette or ship-sloop, with her nationality to be sworn to even all that way off.

'An Englishman, do you think, Captain Keeling?' asked Colonel Bannister.

'Oh, God bless my heart, yes, sir,' answered the skipper.

'Now, *how* do you know, capting?' cried Mrs. Hudson.

'By my instincts as a Briton, ma'am,' he answered; 'patriotism so enlarges the nostril that a man can taste with his nose whenever anything of his country's about in the air.'

'To think of it now!' exclaimed Mrs. Hudson. 'I'm sorry the robbers have left that wreck. I should like the pirates to have been caught by the man-of-war and hung up.'

The hour of noon had been 'made,' as it is called at sea, and it was then a dead calm, with the clear chimes of eight bells ringing through a wonderful stillness on high, so faint was the undulation in the water, so soft the stir in the canvas to the gentle swaying of the tall spars. The wreck of the brig lay about two miles distant off the starboard beam, and by this hour the corvette, as she now proved

to be, with the crimson cross fluttering at her peak, had floated to within a mile and a half or thereabouts on the other side of the hull; and thus the three of us lay. The corvette, slewing her length out to us to the twist of some subtle current upon the still surface, showed a very handsome stately figure of a ship, at that distance at least. Her sails had the fairy-like delicacy of silver tint you observe in the moon when she hangs in an afternoon sky; they fitted the yardarms to perfection, and I stood admiring for a long quarter of an hour at a time the graceful lines of the bolt-ropes faintly curving to the yardarm sheave-holes, each clew looking a little way past the corner of the sail beneath it. A gilt figure-head of some royal device flashed at her bows and shed a ruddy gleam upon the water under it. There was the glistering of gilt about her quarter-galleries, and the sparkle of glass there. But Mr. Prance said that he would swear she was an old ship, her timbers as soft as cheese, and her chain-pumps nearly worn out with plying, for all that she looked in the perspective of that azure atmosphere as airy a beauty as ever gave the milk-white bosoms of her canvas to the wind.

I went down on the quarter-deck to smoke a pipe, and whilst I lay over the bulwark rail watching the man-of-war, my eye was taken by a somewhat curious appearance in the line of the ocean away down in the south-west quarter. It was a sensible depression in the edge of the sea, as though you viewed it through defective window-glass. It was an atmospheric effect, and an odd one. The circle went round with the clearness of the side of a lens, save to that part, and there it looked as though some gigantic knife had pared a piece clean out—with this addition: that there was a curious sort of faintness as of mist where the sky joined the sea in the hollow of this queer dip. I ran my eye over the poop to see if others up there were noting this appearance, but I did not observe that it had won attention. For my part, I should have made nothing of it, accepting it as some trick of refraction, but for it somehow entering into my head to remember how the second mate of the ship I had made my first voyage in once told me of a sudden shift of weather that had taken his craft aback and wrecked her to her tops, and that it had been heralded, though there was no man to interpret the sign, by just such another

horizontal depression as that upon which my eyes were now resting.

However, on dismounting from the bulwarks for a brief yarn with little Saunders, the matter went out of my mind and I thought no more of it.

Whilst we were at lunch, Mr. Cocker came down the companion steps cap in hand, and said something to the captain.

'All right, sir,' I heard old Keeling answer: 'it will be a visit of curiosity rather than of courtesy. How far is the boat?'

'She's only just left the wreck, sir.'

'Very well, Mr. Cocker.'

The second mate remounted the steps.

'The corvette,' exclaimed old Keeling, addressing us generally, 'has sent a boat to the wreck, presumably to overhaul and report upon her. The boat is now approaching us. I have little doubt that the corvette is homeward bound, in which case, ladies and gentlemen, you might be glad to send letters by her. There will be plenty of time. The calm, I fear, threatens to last.'

There was instantly a hurry amongst the passengers, most of whom rushed away from the table to write their letters.

I emptied my wine-glass and went on deck, and saw a man-of-war's boat approaching us; the bright ash oars rose and fell with exquisite precision, and the white water spat from the stem of the little craft as she was swept through it by the rowers, with a young fellow in the uniform of a naval lieutenant of that day steering her. She came flashing alongside; up rose the oars, the lively hearty in the bows hooked on, and the officer, lightly springing on to the rope ladder which had been dropped over the side for his convenience, gained the deck with a twist of his thumb that was meant as a salutation to the ship.

Old Keeling was now on the poop, and Mr. Cocker conducted the lieutenant to him. I happened to be standing near, talking with Colledge and Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss Temple not yet having returned with the letter which she had gone to her cabin to write. The skipper received the naval officer with a gracious bow.

'Our captain,' exclaimed the young fellow, in a gentlemanly easy way, 'instructed me to overhaul yonder wreck, and then come on to you to see if we can be of any service;' and I saw his eye rest with an expression of

delight upon Miss Hudson, who rose through the companion at that instant and drew close to hear what passed.

'Sir,' cried old Keeling, with another bow, 'I am obliged to your captain, sir. It is, sir, very considerate of him to send. My passengers are preparing letters, and we shall be very sensible of your goodness in receiving and transmitting them.'

'Pray, what ship is this, sir?' exclaimed the lieutenant, glancing about him with the curiosity of a stranger, and then taking another thirsty peep at the golden young lady.

'The *Countess Ida*, sir, of and from London for Bombay, so many days out. And pray, what ship is that?'

'His Majesty's ship *Magicienne*.'

Colledge started. 'Beg pardon,' he exclaimed. 'Isn't Sir Edward Panton her commander?'

'He is,' answered the lieutenant.

'By George, my cousin!' cried Colledge; 'haven't seen him these seven years. How doocid odd, now, to fall in with him *here!*'

'Oh, indeed,' said the lieutenant, with a hint of respect in his manner that might have

been wanting in it before. 'May I venture to ask your name?'

'Colledge.'

'Ah! of course; a son of my Lord Sandown. This will be news for Sir Edward.' He sent a look at the corvette, as though measuring the distance between the vessels.

'Sir,' here said old Keeling, 'I believe that luncheon is still upon the table. Let me conduct you below, sir. It will have been a mighty hot ride for you out upon those unsheltered waters.'

The lieutenant bowed, and followed the skipper to the companion. Colledge put his arm through mine and led me to the rail.

'I say, Dugdale,' he exclaimed, 'I should like to see my cousin. It would be rather a lark to visit his ship, wouldn't it? Not too far off, is she, d'ye think?' he added, cocking his eye at the vessel.

'Why, no; not on such a day as this.'

'Will you come if I go?'

'With the greatest pleasure.'

'Oh, that's downright jolly of you, by George. We'll go in my cousin's boat, and he'll send us back. I like the look of those men-of-war's men. It makes one feel safe even

to see them rowing. Ah, there goes something to drink for the poor fellows. Upon my word, old Keeling buttons up a kind heart under that queer coat of his.'

'I presume,' said I, 'that the lieutenant will make no difficulty in consenting to carry us in his boat. I am ignorant of the rules which govern his service. Suppose you step below, and arrange with him? If he may not take us, Keeling will lend us a boat, I am sure.'

Down he went full of eagerness, his handsome face flushed with excitement. Mrs. Radcliffe had joined two or three ladies, and stood with them asking questions of Mr. Cocker about the corvette and the wreck. On glancing through the skylight presently, I saw the lieutenant picking a piece of cold fowl at the table, with a bottle of champagne at his elbow. Old Keeling sat at his side, and opposite were Colledge and Miss Temple. The four of them were chatting briskly. I took a peep at the boat under the gangway. It was a treat to see the jolly English faces of the fellows, and to hear the tongue of the old home spoken over the side. A number of our seamen had perched themselves on the

bulwarks and were calling questions to the men-of-war's-men whilst they watched them draining the glasses which the steward had sent down to them in a basket. From the answers the fellows made I gathered that the *Magicienne* was from Simon's Bay, having been relieved on the coast, where she had been stationed for I will not pretend to remember how long. Small wonder that the bronzed, round-faced, bullet-headed, but exceedingly gentlemanly lieutenant should have fixed a transported eye on the sweet face and golden hair and the violet stars of Miss Hudson after his unendurably long frizzling months of West African beauties.

In about twenty minutes he made his appearance upon deck, followed by Keeling and Miss Temple and Colledge, who came sliding up to me to say that it was all right: the lieutenant would convey us with pleasure and bring us back: and what did I think? Miss Temple was to be of our party.

'Humph!' said I; 'any other ladies?'

He made a grimace. 'No,' he responded in a whisper; 'the lieutenant suggested others; but I could twig in Miss Temple's face that if others went she would remain. You know

there's not a woman on board that she cares about. I rather want,' said he, returning to his former voice, 'to introduce her to my cousin. He will be seeing my father when he returns, and is pretty sure to talk,' said he, giving me a wink.

'Does Miss Temple know that you've invited me?'

'She does, Trojan.'

'And how did she receive the news?'

'With rapture,' he cried.

'A fig for such raptures! but I'll go, spite of her delight.'

By this time Miss Temple had made known her intentions to her aunt. I became aware of this circumstance by the old lady uttering a loud shriek.

'It is entirely out of the question; I forbid you to go,' she cried, with a face of agony on her.

'Nonsense!' answered Miss Temple: she and her aunt and old Keeling and the lieutenant were slowly coming towards the break of the poop, where Colledge and I waited whilst this altercation proceeded; so everything said was plainly to be heard by us. 'It is as calm as a river,' exclaimed the girl, sending one of her flashing looks at the sea.

'You may be drowned; you may never return. I will not permit it. What would your mother think?' cried poor Mrs. Radcliffe vehemently, pecking away with her face, and clapping her hands to emphasise her words.

'Aunt, do not be ridiculous, I beg. I shall go. It will amuse me, and I am already very weary of the voyage. Only consider: at this rate of sailing we may be five or six months longer at sea. This is a little harmless, safe distraction. Now, *don't* be foolish, auntie.'

The old lady appealed to Captain Keeling. He was looking somewhat dubiously round the horizon when the lieutenant broke in; then Colledge indulged in a flourish, and though I can't trace the steps of it, nor recollect the talk, somehow or other a little later on the three of us were in the boat, a bag of letters on a thwart, the lieutenant picking up the yoke-lines as he seated himself, the bow-oar thrusting off, with a vision through the open rail of the poop of old Captain Keeling stiffly sawing the air with his arms, in some effort, as I took it, to console Mrs. Radcliffe, who flourished a handkerchief to her face as though she wept.

CHAPTER XVII

THE 'MAGICIENNE'

The corvette looked a mighty long distance away from the low elevation of the boat's gunwale—almost as far as the horizon, it seemed to my eyes, though from the height of the deck of the Indiaman the sea-line showed something above the bulwarks of the man-of-war. One hardly noticed the movement in the sea on board the *Countess Ida*, so solemn and steady was the swing of the great fabric, a movement stealing into one's thoughts like a habit, and leaving one unconscious of it; but the heave was instantly to be felt in the boat, and I own that I could not have believed there was so much swell until I felt the lift of the noiseless polished fold and marked the soft blue volume of the water brimming to the hot and blistered sides and green sheathing of the Indiaman.

A huge lump of a ship she looked as we

were swept away from her; her masts soaring in three spires with the flash of a vane above the airy gossamer of the loftiest cloths; groups of passengers watching us from the violet-tinted shadow under the awning, heads of seamen at the rail, or figures of them upon the forecastle near the huge cathead that struck a shadow of its own into the water under it. The great bowsprit went tapering to the delicacy of the flying-jib-boom end marshalling the flight of white jibs; a stream of radiance floated in the water under each large window. Inexpressible is the effect she produced taken along with the dwindling of her to the impulse of our oars, with the fining down into thinnest notes of the voices of the people, and with the soft and still softening sounds of her canvas lightly swaying.

'A grand old ship,' exclaimed the lieutenant.

'I had no idea she owned such a handsome stern,' said Colledge; 'quite a blaze of gilt, I do protest, Miss Temple. How gloriously old Keeling's cabin-window sparkles amid the gingerbread magnificence of decoration.'

'What is there in the art of painting to reproduce such a picture as that?' exclaimed

Miss Temple, with her dark eyes glowing to the mood of delight raised in her by the beautiful spectacle. 'It is like looking at an image in a soap-bubble. What brush could fling those silver-bluish daintinesses of tint upon canvas, and make one see the ship through this atmosphere filled with ocean-light?'

'Ocean-light!' exclaimed the lieutenant, viewing her with an air of profound admiration; 'that is the fit expression, madam. Light at sea is different from light on shore'

'As how?' cried Colledge.

'Oh, my dear fellow, see what a reflecting eye the ocean has,' said I; 'it stares back in glory to the glory that looks down upon it. Mould and clay can't do that, you know.'

'True,' said the lieutenant.

'Pray,' said I, addressing him, 'when you overhauled that hull yonder, did you meet with anything to warrant our suspicion that she was a rover?'

'I found no papers,' said he; 'forward, she is burnt into a shell. All her guns are gone—dropped overboard, I suppose, to keep her afloat. She has a little round-house aft, and in it sits a man.'

'A man?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'He sits in a musing posture,' continued the lieutenant; 'he frowns, and seems vexed. He holds a feather pen in one hand, and supports his head on the elbow of his left arm, but he doesn't write: possibly because there is no ink and the wind seems to have blown his paper away.'

'Is he dead?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'Quite,' responded the lieutenant, with a smile of enjoyment of her beauty.

'God bless me!' cried Colledge, staring at the hull under the sharp of his hand.

'Is she a picaroon, think you, sir?' said I.

'Impossible to say,' he answered; 'there are stands of small-arms in her cabin below, and a sweep of 'tween-decks full of piratic bedding. She will have been crowded with sailors, I should think, sir.'

The six men-of-war's men were making the fine little cutter hum as they bent to their oars, one hairy face showing past another, the eyes of each man upon his blade, though now and again one or another would steal a respectful peep at Miss Temple. What exquisite discipline their demeanour suggested! One hardly needed to do more than glance at them

to sound to the very depths the whole philosophy of our naval story. How should it be otherwise than as it is with a nation that could be the mother of such children as those fellows?

The lieutenant was very talkative, and had a deal to say about the West Coast of Africa and Cape Town; and he had a great many questions to ask about home. Miss Temple constantly directed her eyes over the side, as though affected and even startled by the proximity of the mighty surface. And boundless the light blue heaving plain looked as it went swimming to the far-off slope of sky that it seemed to wash—the vaster, the more enormous for the breaks of toy-like craft upon it; for the Indiaman and the corvette were standards to assist the mind into some perception of the surrounding immensity, and never to me did the heavens seem so high nor the curve of the ocean boundary so remote as I found them from the low seat of the cutter, with the corvette growing over the bow, and the Indiaman astern dwarfed to the dimensions of a boy's model of a ship.

It was a longer pull than I should have

believed, and roastingly hot, thanks to the flaming reflection that filled the heart of the sea, and to the motionless atmosphere, which was scarcely to be stirred even into the subtlest fanning of the cheek by our passage through it. Miss Temple's face in the shadow of her parasol resembled some incomparable carving in marble, and but little of vitality was to be seen in it outside of her rich, full, eloquent eyes, when she fell into some pause of thought and looked away into the dim blue distance as though she beheld a vision down in it. The corvette appeared deserted, with her high bulwarks topped yet with a line of hammocks; but it was easy to see that it was known on board the lieutenant was bringing a lady along with others to visit the man-of-war, for there was already a proper gangway ladder over the side, with a grating to step out on, though the broad-beamed craft swayed more to the swell than the Indiaman, and so dipped the platform that it needed a deal of manœuvring to save Miss Temple from wetting her feet.

Sir Edward Panton, a tall, exceedingly handsome man, with iron-grey hair and a sun-reddened complexion, received us at the

gangway. He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes when Colledge called out to him. He welcomed Miss Temple with an air of lofty respectful dignity that would have sat well upon some nobleman of magnificence welcoming a royal visitor to his home. Chairs were brought from the cabin and placed on the quarter-deck in the shelter of the awning, along with a little table, upon which were put some excellent sherry, claret, and seltzer-water, and a box of capital cigars. The look of this ship, after the Indiaman's encumbered decks broken by their poop and topgallant forecastle, was a real treat to the seafaring eye. She was flush fore and aft: every plank was as white as a peeled almond; the black breeches of her artillery gave a noble, massive, imposing character to her tall, immensely thick bulwarks; the ratlines showed straight as thin bars of iron in the wide spread of shrouds and topmast rigging; the running gear was flemish-coiled; the brass-work sparkled like burnished gold; the snow-like cloths of the fore-course gathered an amazing brightness from their mere contrast with the red coat of a marine pacing the forecastle; the sailors, in white clothes, straw-hats, and naked feet, sprang

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softly here and there to the light chirrupings of a pipe, or went on with the various jobs they were about on deck and in the rigging amid a silence that one might ask for in vain among a crew of merchantmen. Far away down upon the starboard beam was the Indiaman, blue in the airy distance, with a sort of winking of shadows upon her square and lofty canvas, as the cloths swung in and out, brightening and dimming.

Sir Edward was delighted to see his cousin, and it seemed as if there was to be no end to their talk, so numberless were the questions the commander put about home, his family, doings in London, matters political, and so on, and so on. I had a chance, whilst Colledge was spinning some long twister of private interest to Sir Edward, to exchange a few words with Miss Temple, whose behaviour in the main might have easily led me to believe that she was absolutely unconscious of my presence; in fact, I shouldn't have addressed her then but for finding in the domestic and personal gossip of the two cousins an obligation of either talking or walking away.

'The *Countess Ida* looks a long distance off, Miss Temple.'

'Farther, I think, than this ship looks from her.'

'That is owing to a change in the atmosphere. We shall be having some weather by-and-by.'

'Not before we return, I hope.'

'The blue thickens yonder,' I exclaimed, indicating that quarter of the sea where I had noticed the depression of the horizon.

She gazed listlessly; her eyes then went roaming over the ship with a sparkle in them of the pleasure the whiteness and the brightness and the orderliness of all that she beheld gave her.

Presently Sir Edward exclaimed: 'Miss Temple, you would like to inspect this vessel, I am sure. I wish to show Stephen my wife's portrait, and I want you to see it. Mr. Dugdale, you will join us.'

Down we went into a very pleasant cabin, and the captain produced a water-colour sketch of his lady.

'A sweet face!' exclaimed Miss Temple; whilst Sir Edward gazed at the picture with eyes full of the yearning heart of a sailor long divorced from his love.

'Have you found your charmer yet,

Stephen?' said he. 'Any girl won your budding affections?'

The youth looked at me suddenly and turned of a deep red. I believe he would have said no at once, and with a cocksure face, had I not been there. Miss Temple's gaze rested upon him.

'Why, who is it, Stephen, eh?' exclaimed Sir Edward with a merry laugh. 'See how he blushes, Miss Temple! a sure sign that he has let go his anchor, though he is riding to a long scope all the way out here. Who is it, Steve?'

'Oh, hang it, Ned, never mind; you bother a fellow so,' answered Colledge with a fine air of mingled irritation and confusion, and a half-look at me that was just the same as saying, 'What an ass I am making of myself!'

'Miss Temple,' exclaimed Sir Edward, laughing heartily again, 'he may possibly have confided the lady's name to you? Pray satisfy my curiosity, that I may congratulate him before we part.'

'I am as ignorant as you are,' she replied, with an expression of cold surprise in her face.

I marched to a porthole to look out, that I might conceal an irrepressible grin.

'I say, show us the ship, will ye, Ned?' shouted Colledge; 'there's a long pull before us, and we're bound to India, you know.'

Captain Panton led the way out of the cabin, and went in advance with Miss Temple, pointing here and explaining there, and full of his ship. Colledge sidled up to me.

'Dugdale,' he exclaimed in a whisper, 'do you believe that Miss Temple will guess from my idiotic manner just now that I'm engaged to be married?'

'Oh yes; I saw her gaze sink right into you and then go clean through you. It is best as it is, Colledge. You may breathe freely now.'

He smothered an execration, and continued gloomy and silent for some time. There was not very much to be seen below. We were presently on deck; and after another ten minutes' chat, during which Colledge seemed to regain his spirits, the boat was ordered alongside.

'It shall be my secret as well as yours, Stephen, long before you are home from your tiger-hunts!' exclaimed Sir Edward at the

gangway, waggishly shaking his forefinger at his cousin.

We shook hands, entered the boat; the lieutenant took his seat, the oars sparkled, and away we went with a flourish of our hats to the commander, who stood for some time in the open gangway watching us.

'There's a trifle more swell than there was, I fancy,' said I to the lieutenant.

'I think there is,' he answered, looking over the sea as if he thought of something else.

'What a confounded quiz Ned is!' exclaimed Colledge. 'He's rather too fond of a laugh at other people's expense. I think that sort of thing a mistake myself.'

'He is a very handsome gentleman,' said I.

'Well, I'm mighty glad to have seen him,' said Colledge. 'He's a dear good fellow, only—— I hope you've enjoyed the trip, Miss Temple?'

'Thoroughly, thank you; it is a delightful change. How strange to think of that toy yonder as being our home for some months to come! It is like fancying one's self as dwelling in a star, to see her floating out there in the

blue haze, as though she were poised in the atmosphere.'

She fastened her eyes on the Indiaman as she spoke. One saw in this that she had a sailor's observation for atmospheric effect. Star-like the ship looked in the distance—a dash of misty light in the blue haze, hovering, as it were, above the junction of sea and sky, where the blending of the elements was so dim and hot that you couldn't tell where they met.

'Isn't it thickening up a trifle, somehow?' said I to the lieutenant. 'Look to the right of the wreck there—what is that appearance?'

'What do you see?' he exclaimed.

'Why, to my fancy, it is as though there were a dust-storm miles away yonder.'

He smiled, and answered: 'Mere heat. One doesn't need many months on the West African coast to grow used to that sort of aspects. They suggest nothing but quinine to me.'

'What time is it?' said Colledge.

We pulled out our watches: it was half-past four.

'I am sorry we are returning to the Indiaman,' said he. 'I should like to get away from her for a little while; then one would

find something of freshness in her when one returned. I am not thirsting to meet Mr. Johnson and Mr. Emmett and Mr. Greenhew again. Are you, Miss Temple?'

She slightly smiled, and said, 'I wish Bombay were as near to us as the *Magicienne* is to the Indiaman.'

'I have an idea!' cried Colledge, whose shining eyes, methought, seemed to suggest the influence of the last large bumper of sherry he had tossed down before leaving the corvette. 'Let us kill another hour by boarding the wreck.'

'I shall be very pleased to put the boat alongside,' said the lieutenant. 'What do you say, Miss Temple?'

She looked at the Indiaman, and then sent a swift glance at me, as though she would read my face without having me know she had peeped at it.

'Will there be time before it falls dark?' she answered. 'I am in no hurry to return; but I do not want to make my aunt miserable by remaining out upon the water until after sunset.'

'Oh, we have abundance of time,' said the lieutenant.

'It will give us so much to talk about,' exclaimed Colledge. 'I want to see what sort of a ship it was that frightened us so abominably the other day.'

'What do you say, Mr. Dugdale?' said Miss Temple.

'I am thinking of the lonely sentinel this gentleman was telling us about as we came along,' said I.

'Oh, one peep! one peep at him, just one peep!' cried Colledge: '*don't* let us go back to the Indiaman too soon. At this rate,' he added, turning up his slightly flushed face to the sky, 'we may have another six months of her.'

The lieutenant laughed, and, anxious to please him, as I supposed, quietly pulled a yoke-line and swept the boat's head fair for the hull. His making nothing of the appearance I had called his attention to was reassuring. I should have thought nothing of it either but for the indent in the horizon that morning, and the recollection that grew out of it, as I have told you. But then old Keeling had let us start from his ship without a hint, and Sir Edward had uttered no caution, though, to be sure, in those days the barometer was

not the shaper of marine speculations it has since become; and the silence of these two skippers, and the smile and careless rejoinder of the lieutenant, should have been amply satisfying. Nevertheless, there was no question but that the light swell heaving out of the north-west was sensibly gaining in volume and speed, and that it was the mere respiration of the ocean I could by no means persuade myself, though it might signify nothing.

Colledge grew somewhat frolicsome; indeed, I seemed to find an artificiality in his spirits, as though he would clear Miss Temple's memory of Captain Panton's *badinage* by laughter and jokes. The lieutenant fell in with his humour, said some comical things, and told one or two lively anecdotes of the blacks of that part of the coast the corvette was fresh from. The men-of-war's men pulled steadily, and the keen stem of the cutter sheared through the oil-smooth surface with a noise as of the ripping of satin; but now and again she would swing down into a hollow that put the low sides of the wreck out of sight, whilst, as we approached, I noticed that the hull was leaning from side to side in a swing which did not need to greatly increase

to put the lieutenant to his trumps to get Miss Temple aboard.

But by this time the girl was showing some vivacity, smiling at the lieutenant's jokes, laughing lightly in her clear, rich, trembling tones at Colledge's remarks. It seemed to me as if her previous quietude had produced a resolution which she was now acting up to. She was apparently eager to inspect the wreck, and said that such an adventure would make a heroine of her at home when she came to tell the story of it.

It was a long, dragging pull over that heaving, breathless sea, and through that sweltering afternoon, with its sky of the complexion of brass about the zenith. The three craft, as they lay, formed a right-angled triangle, the apex, to call it so, being the derelict, and the getting to her involved a longer stretching of the Jacks' backs than, as I suspected, the lieutenant had calculated on. The sweat poured from the men's brows, and their faces were like purple rags under their straw hats as they swung with the precision and the monotony of the tick of a clock over the looms of their oars.

'She's rather unsteady, isn't she?' ex-

claimed Colledge as we approached the hulk.

'So much the better,' said the lieutenant; 'her bulwarks are gone, and every dip inclines her bare deck as a platform for a jump.'

'She may be sinking,' cried Miss Temple.

'Dry as a bone, madam, I assure you,' said the officer. 'I looked into her hold, and there's scarce more water than would serve to drown a rat.'

'I see her name in long white letters under her counter,' I exclaimed. 'Can you read it, Colledge?'

'The *Aspirante*,' said the lieutenant.

We now fell silent, with our eyes upon the hull, whilst the officer manœuvred with the yokelines to run the cutter handsomely alongside. A single chime from a bell came thrilling with a soft silver note through the hushed air. Miss Temple started, and the officer grinned into Colledge's face, but nothing was said. She was a very clean wreck. Her foremast stood stoutly supported by the shrouds; but the braces of the foreyard were slack, and the swing of the spar, upon which the canvas lay rolled in awkward heaps, roughly secured by lines, as though the work

of hands wild with hurry, somehow imparted a strange, forlorn, most melancholy character to the nakedness of that solitary mast. She showed no guns; her decks appeared to have been swept; the rise of her in the water proved that her people must have jettisoned a deal of whatever they were able to come at; her wheel was gone, and her rudder slowly swayed to every heave. There were a few ropes' ends over her side, the hacked remains of standing-rigging; but the water brimmed clear of wreckage to her channels.

'Oars!' cried the lieutenant. The bowman sprang erect; and in a few moments we were floating alongside, soaring and falling against the black run of her, with the deck gaping through the length of smashed bulwark to the level of our heads when we stood up, each time she came lazily rolling over to us. The clear chime of the bell rang out again.

'What is it?' cried Miss Temple.

'The ship's bell,' said the lieutenant; 'it has got jammed as it hangs, and the tongue strikes the side when the heave is a little sharper than usual.'

He followed this on with certain directions

to the men. Two of them, watching their chance, sprang on to the slope of the deck, and then went hoisting up away from us as the hull swayed wearily to starboard. 'Stand by now!' bawled the lieutenant. 'Miss Temple, let me assist you on to this thwart.' She leapt upon it with something of defiance in her manner, and the officer, grasping her elbow, supported her. I thought Colledge looked a little uneasy and pale. We waited; but an opportunity was some time in coming.

'Mr. Colledge,' said the lieutenant, 'be kind enough to take my place and support the lady.' He jumped lightly into the main-chains, and was on deck in a jiffy. 'Haul her in close, men. Now, Miss Temple. Catch hold of my hand and of this sailor's when I say so.'

Up swung the boat; the girl extended her hands, which were instantly grasped. 'Jump, madam!' and she went in a graceful bound from the thwart to the deck.

I watched till a heave brought me on a line with the chains into which I jumped.

'Now, Mr. Colledge!' called out the lieutenant. He hung in the wind, and I thought he would refuse to leave the boat; but Miss

Temple with her face slightly flushed stood watching as though waiting for him, her noble figure swaying with a marvellous careless grace upon the floating slopes of the planks; and this started him. He got on to a thwart, where he was supported by a sailor till a chance offered for his hands to be gripped, and then he was hauled on to the hull; but he came perilously near to going overboard, for the sudden sinking away of the cutter from under him paralysed his effort to jump, and he swung against the side of the wreck in the grasp of the lieutenant and a seaman, who dragged him up just in time to save his legs from being ground by the soaring of the boat. The two sailors then jumped into the cutter, which shoved off, and lay rising and falling upon the quarter to the scope of her painter.

CHAPTER XVIII

ADRIFT

THERE was a small deck-house standing abaft the jagged ends of the stump of the mainmast, a low-pitched, somewhat narrow, and rather long structure, with a door facing the wheel, or where the wheel had stood, and a couple of small windows on either hand, the glass of which was entirely gone.

'The lonely watchman of this wreck is still at home, doubtless waiting to receive us,' said the lieutenant, pointing to the little building. 'Shall we pay him a visit?'

'Oh yes; let us see everything that there may be to look at,' answered Colledge, who had not yet recovered his breath, but who was working hard, I could see, to regain his late air of vivacity, though he was pale, and shot several uneasy glances around him as he spoke.

'I would rather not look,' said Miss Temple; 'it will make me dream.'

'You will have nothing to talk about, then,' said Colledge.

'It is the most natural object in the world,' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'if he could be stuffed, preserving the posture he is in, and exhibited in London, thousands would assemble to view him.

I left them to persuade Miss Temple if they could, and walking aft, opened the door, and peeped in. It was just a plain, immensely strong, roughly furnished deck erection, with a small hatch close against the entrance, conducting, as I supposed, to the cabin beneath. On either side went a row of lockers; in the centre was a short narrow table, supported by stanchions; and at this table sat the figure of a man. He was in an attitude of writing; his right hand grasped a long feather pen; his left elbow was on the table, and his cheek was supported by his hand. He was dressed in white jean breeches, the ends of which were stuffed into a pair of yellow leather half-boots. There was a large belt round his waist, clasped by some ornament resembling a two-headed eagle, of a shining metal, probably silver. His shirt was a pale red flannel, over which was a jacket cut in the Spanish fashion; his

hair was long, and flowed in black ringlets upon his back. His hat was a large sombrero, and I had to walk abreast of him to see his face. I was prepared to witness a ghastly sight. Instead, I beheld a countenance of singular beauty. It was as if the hand of death had moulded some faultless human countenance out of white wax. The lids of the eyes drooped, and the gaze seemed rooted upon the table, as though the man lay rapt and motionless in some sweet and perfect dream. His small moustache was like a touch of delicate pencilling. He looked to have been a person of some three or four and twenty years of age.

As I stood surveying the figure, the interior was shadowed. Miss Temple and the others stood in the doorway. The lieutenant and Colledge entered; the girl would not approach.

'Here, Miss Temple,' said I, 'is the handsomest man I have ever seen.'

'Can he be dead?' exclaimed Colledge in a subdued voice of awe.

'He'll never be deader,' said the lieutenant, peering curiously into the face of the corpse. '*Handsome*, do you consider him, sir? Well,

we all have our tastes, to be sure. He looks like a woman masquerading.'

'Who was he, I wonder?' asked Miss Temple in a low tone, standing in a half-shrinking attitude at the door.

'Very hard to say,' said I. 'Too young for the captain, I should think. Probably the mate.'

'A pirate, anyway,' said the lieutenant.

'Hark!' cried Miss Temple; 'this ship is tolling his knell.'

The mellow chime floated past the ear. The effect was extraordinary, so clear was the note as it rang through the soft sounds of the weltering waters; so ghostly, wild, and unreal, too, the character it gathered from the presence of that silent, stirless penman.

'I say, we've seen enough of him, I think,' exclaimed Colledge.

'Shall we bury him?' said I.

'Oh no, sir,' exclaimed the lieutenant; 'this sheer hulk is his coffin. Leave the dead to bury their dead. Now for a glimpse of the cabin.'

Miss Temple entered with some reluctance; the lieutenant handed her through the hatch

down the short ladder, and Colledge and I followed. We found ourselves in a moderately-sized state-room of the width of the little vessel, with bulkheads at either end, each containing a couple of cabins. There was a small skylight overhead, all the glass of it shattered, but light enough fell through to enable us to see easily. Colledge had plucked up heart, and now bustled about somewhat manfully, opening the cabin doors, starting as if he saw horrible sights, cracking jokes as in the boat, and calling to Miss Temple to look here and look there, and so on.

'Hallo!' cried the lieutenant, putting his head into one of the cabins at the fore-end of the state-room; 'I missed this room when I overhauled her. What have we here? A pantry is it, or a larder?'

I looked over his shoulder, and by the faint light sifting through the bull's-eye in the deck, made out the contents of what was apparently a storeroom. There were several shelves containing crockery, cheeses, hams, and other articles of food. Under the lower shelf, heaped upon the deck, were stowed several dozens of bottles in straw.

'The corsairs,' said the lieutenant, 'will

always be memorable for the excellence of their tipple. What is this, now?'

He picked up a bottle, knocked off the head, and taking a little tin drinking-vessel from a shelf, half filled it, then smelled, and tasted.

'An exquisite Burgundy,' he cried. 'Try it, Mr. Dugdale.'

It was indeed a very choice sound wine. The lieutenant half filled a pannikin for Colledge, who emptied it with a sigh of enjoyment. 'What would my father give for such stuff as this!' said he.

The lieutenant found a wine-glass, which he carefully cleansed with the liquor, and then filling it, he asked Miss Temple to drink to the confusion of all pirates. She laughed, and declined.

'Oh, you must sip it, if you please,' cried Colledge, 'if only to heighten the romance of this adventure. Think of the additional colour your story will get out of this incident of drinking perdition to the corsairs in wine of their own!'

She was about to answer, when the hull rolled heavily. The lieutenant slipped; the wine-glass fell to the deck, and was shivered;

Colledge, grasping me to steady himself, threw me off my balance, and the pair of us went rolling to the bottles. The young fellow scrambled on to his legs with a loud laugh.

'I believe this vessel is tipsy,' said he.

'Do you mark the increase in the weight of the swell?' I exclaimed as I regained my legs.

The roll of the vessel the other way had been severe, and now she was dipping her sides regularly with an oscillation extravagant enough to render standing very inconvenient.

'We must be off, I think,' said the lieutenant.

'Miss Temple hasn't drunk confusion to the pirates,' exclaimed Colledge with the persistency of brains flushed with wine.

'I would rather not do so,' she answered, her fine face looking curiously pale in that dull light, whilst she glanced restlessly towards the state cabin. She pulled out a little watch. 'It is certainly time to return to the Indiaman,' she added.

'Oh, but don't let us leave all this noble drink to go down to the bottom of the sea,' cried Colledge. 'Is there nothing that we can pack some of the bottles in? If we could

only manage to get away with a couple of dozen—twelve for ourselves and twelve for my cousin?'—and with red face and bright eyes he went staggering with the heave of the hull to the shelves and stood holding on, looking about him.

'It might be managed, I think,' said the lieutenant, who seemed all anxiety to oblige him.

'I wish to be gone,' exclaimed Miss Temple with a strong hint of the imperiousness that had been familiar to me in the Indiaman in the air with which she looked at and addressed the lieutenant. 'What is the meaning of this increased rolling? I shall not be able to enter the boat.'

'No fear of that, madam,' answered the lieutenant; 'a dismasted egg-shell like this will roll to the weakest heave. A trifle more swell has certainly set in, but it is nothing.'

I was not so sure of that. What he was pleased to describe as a trifling increase was to my mind, and very distinctly too, a heightening and broadening of the undulations, of which the significance was rendered strong by the suddenness of the thing. It meant wind close at hand, I could swear.

'I'll go on deck and see how things are,' said I.

'Take me with you, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'You will suffer me to assist you?' said the lieutenant.

'Oh, I say, *don't* leave all this wine here,' cried Colledge. 'Mr.—I mean Lieutenant—upon my word, I must apologise for not having asked your name—can't we manage to find some old basket'——

'What is that down in the corner there, Mr. Colledge?' said the lieutenant, laughing.

'Pray, take me on deck, Mr. Dugdale?' exclaimed Miss Temple haughtily and with temper, and she came to my side and passed her arm through mine.

The swaying of the light hull without top-hamper to steady her so hindered one's movements by the staggering lurches it flung one into, that it cost me no small effort to steer a fair course with Miss Temple hanging to me, to the cabin steps. I helped her up the ladder, and felt in her arm the shudder that swept through her as she sent a single swift glance at the dead figure at the table.

The moment I emerged I cried out: 'My

God! see there! Why, if we are not quick'—— And putting my head into the doorway again, I roared down the hatch: 'For heaven's sake, come on deck, or we shall lose both ships!'

Indeed, all away in the north-west was a white blankness of vapour bearing right down upon the hull, with a long and heavy swell rolling out of it, the heads of which as they came washing from under the base of the thickness were dark with wind. The sky overhead was of a sort of watery ashen colour, going down to the eastern sea-line in a weak, dim blue, so obscure with the complexion of the approaching vaporous mass that the corvette on the left hand and the Indiaman on the right appeared as little more than pallid smudges, with a kind of looming out of their dull, distorted proportions that made them show as though they hung upon the very verge of the ocean. I told Miss Temple to hold to the side of the deck-house to steady herself, and rushed to the quarter. The cutter lay there to the scope of her painter, rising and falling in a manner bewildering to see to one who knew that she had to be entered from these perilously sloping decks. The moment

my head was seen, one of the sailors bawled out: 'The Indiaman's fired two guns, sir.'

'Why the deuce,' I shouted in a passion, 'didn't one of you jump aboard to report what was coming? Haul alongside, for God's sake.'

At this moment the lieutenant appeared, followed by Colledge. He took one look, and came in a bound to the sheer edge of the deck, where the remains of the line of crushed bulwarks stood like fangs. 'Lively now!' he cried; 'hand over hand with it.'

'We shall be smothered out of sight in a few minutes,' I exclaimed; 'shall we be acting wisely in quitting this hull? We may lose both ships in that weather there, and what will there be to do then?'

'Don't frighten the lady, sir,' he answered, turning upon me with a frown. 'Miss Temple, there is nothing to be alarmed at. We shall get you into the boat simply enough, and the vapour will speedily clear. I know these waters.'

Colledge stood gazing round him, looking horribly frightened. The boat was dragged alongside: one moment she was above the level of the naked edge of the deck; the next

she was sliding away out of sight into the hollow, with the wreck rolling heavily off from her.

'Now, Miss Temple,' cried the lieutenant. 'Help me to steady the lady, Mr. Dugdale. Stand by, two of you men there, to receive her.'

Miss Temple set her lips, and her eyes were on fire with anger and fear. 'I shall not be able to enter that boat,' said she.

'Oh, madam, be persuaded,' cried the lieutenant, speaking irritably out of his clear perception of the danger of delay and of the peril of passing her into the cutter. 'Mr. Dugdale, take Miss Temple's arm.'

She shrank back, with a firmer grip of the deck-house, against which she had set her shoulder to steady herself. 'You will kill me!' she cried.

'Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed the lieutenant wildly, 'for God's sake, jump into the boat, that Miss Temple may see how easily it is to be done. I must be the last to leave.'

'Let Mr. Colledge jump first,' said I. 'I may probably be more useful to you and the lady than he.'

'Jump, Mr. Colledge!' cried the lieutenant.

The young fellow went to the edge of the deck. 'I shall break my neck,' he shouted; 'I shall fall into the sea; I shall be drowned.'

'No, sir! no, sir!' roared one of the seamen; 'jump as the boat lifts; we'll catch you.'

'*Now!*' cried the lieutenant.

Colledge sprang; down sank the boat out of sight; then up she soared again with Colledge safe in the embrace of one of the most powerful of the sailors.

'Here it comes!' said I.

As the words left my lips, the wind, with a long fierce howl, swept over the deck of the hull, and a moment later the fog was boiling all about us. It was like a mighty burst of steam; and in a breath the ocean vanished, and there was nothing to see but the wool-white blankness and a space of thirty or forty feet of water beyond the wreck. All on a sudden, the lieutenant, who had gone to the edge of the deck, perhaps to see how it was with Colledge, or to bawl some further directions to the seamen, staggered to a deep and swinging heel of the hull and went overboard. It

happened in a second. My instant impression was that he had jumped for the boat; but I knew better when I heard the men roaring out.

'For heaven's sake, Miss Temple,' I cried, 'keep a firm hold, and do not attempt to stir, or the angle of the decks will certainly rush you over the side.'

So saying, I staggered to the quarter where there were some eight or ten feet of bulwarks still standing, and looked over. The men had let go the painter of their boat, and were shouting instructions to one another as some of them flung their oars over into the rowlocks, whilst others overhung the gunwale eagerly with pale faces and looks of consternation and dread, searching the round volumes of the swell, which the wind was now whipping into yeast, for any signs of their officer.

'Keep alongside!' I bellowed; 'he will rise near.'

But the fellows were distracted, unnerved, and there was nobody to give them orders. The howling of the wind, the sudden leaping down upon them of this blindness of white vapour, the violent upheavals and sinkings of

the cutter upon the run of the liquid hills, heavily increased the distraction raised in them by their lieutenant's disappearance. They had three oars out, possessed, I suppose, by some mad fancy of merely paddling whilst they stared round the water; and even whilst I watched them, and whilst I yelled to them to get their six oars over, and to pull for their lives to alongside the wreck, the boat, yielding to the full weight of the blast and to the long irresistible heavings of the swell, faded out of sight in the flying thickness; and ere I could fully realise what had occurred, the narrow space of foam-freckled pouring waters showed blank to where the flying vapour seemed to hang like a wall of white smoke.

I continued to stare, occasionally bringing my eyes away from the spot where the boat had vanished to the water alongside; but the lieutenant had sunk. There could be no doubt that the poor fellow on rising from his first dive had struck the bends of the hull as she rolled heavily over to the trough where he had vanished, and so had been drowned, struck down again into the depths, to rise no more. I could not realise the truth. I felt

as if I had fallen crazy, and was imagining dreadful horrors. It was but a minute or two before that he had turned to me with a frown—it was but a little while before that he was full of jokes and laughter in the cabin —and now he lay a dead man, sinking and yet sinking under our heaving and plunging keel, dead as the figure yonder in that little cabin, of whom he had spoken jestingly so lately that the words and tone of his voice were still in my ear!

'Where is the boat, Mr. Dugdale?'

I turned slowly round and looked at the girl with an air of stupefaction, then stared again into the blankness, and with shuddering heart swept my eyes over the water alongside, brimming in humpbacked rounds to the very line of the deck, and sweeping away into the near thickness with a spitting and seething and flashing of foam off each long slant to the fierce shrill smiting of the wind.

'Has the boat left us, Mr. Dugdale?'

With a desperate effort I rallied myself, and watching for my chances betwixt the wild slopings of the deck, I reached the deck-house, and held on by the girl's side.

'The boat has been blown away. The

men fell imbecile, I do believe, when they saw their officer drop overboard. What madmen to let go the painter, to manœuvre with three oars in a heavy cutter in the teeth of such a wind as this, and on the top of that swell!'

'Did they recover the lieutenant?' she asked.

'No.'

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she shrieked, 'do you tell me he is drowned?'

'Yes—yes—he is drowned,' I answered, scarce able to articulate for the sudden fit of horror that came upon me again.

'Drowned!' she exclaimed. 'Oh no—not so suddenly! He may be struggling close against the vessel now'—she moved as if to go to the side to look. I grasped her arm.

'Do not stir,' I cried; 'the slope of the deck will carry you overboard. It is all open to the water abreast of us.'

'Shocking! It is unendurable! Drowned so swiftly! And the boat—the boat, Mr. Dugdale?'

The cruel distress in her voice, the anguish of mind expressed in her parted lips, her heaving breast, her strained, brilliant, wide-

open staring looks about her, obliged me to recollect myself by forcing me to understand my obligations as a man.

'Miss Temple, this fog may prove but a passing thickness. There is a clear sky over it, and when the vapour settles away, the sea will open to its confines. The Indiaman knows we are here. We were watched, too, from the corvette, no doubt, and she must regain her boat besides. The cutter is a powerful little fabric, and there is nothing as yet in this weather or in that sea to hurt her. It is a hard experience for you; but it will prove a brief one only, I am sure. Let me assist you to a seat in this deck-house. Your having to hold on here is fatiguing and dangerous.'

'I could not enter whilst that man is there,' she exclaimed. 'Oh, hark to that bell!' she cried hysterically; 'it is tolling for *us* now!'

'You must be sheltered,' I exclaimed; 'and that body must come out of it. Will you sit on the deck? You will be safer so.'

She sank down; and to still further secure her, I went sliding and clawing like a monkey to the quarter, where, with my knife, I severed an end of rope—a piece of gear belayed to a pin—with which I returned to her side. I

passed the line round her waist, and firmly attached the ends to one of several iron uprights which supported the structure; and begging her to compose her mind, and not to doubt of our deliverance within the next two or three hours, I entered the little building.

It was a loathsome job; but the girl must be sheltered, and it was not to be borne that she should have such a companion as that corpse, when there was the great graveyard of the sea within an easy drag to receive the body. Yet I must own to coming to a stand with a long look at the silent figure before I could muster up stomach enough to lay hands upon him. Indeed, as I now fixed my eyes on the body, I wondered whether he could be really dead, so startlingly lifelike was his posture, so pensive his air, so vital the aspect of him to the minutest feature, down to the pen betwixt his fingers, and the reposeful position of his small wax-white hand upon the table. How could I tell but that he might be in some sort of trance, and that my heaving him overboard would be the same as murdering him? However, after a spell of staring, I shook off these alarms and conjectures, and grasping him by the arm, got him upon the deck; and

presently I had him abreast of that part of the brig's side where the bulwarks were gone; and trembling as violently as though I were about to drown a living being, I waited for a roll of the hull, then gave the body a heave, and away it went, striking the swell in a diving attitude, and floating off and down into it, as if it swam.

This done, I crept back to Miss Temple and squatted beside her.

CHAPTER XIX

NIGHT

THE wind blew hard, and the vapour swept past in a horizontal pouring, masses of it coming on a sudden in a blinding thickness till you could not see half the wreck's length; then the silver-tinted volumes would brighten for a breath or two, and show the steel-coloured sea heaving its freckled and foamless folds into the vaporous faintness a few hundred feet off; then the mist would boil down and over us once more until it was like being in a room filled with steam.

'The cabin is empty,' said I—the girl being on the port side, I had taken care to drag the body to starboard—'there are seats, and you will be sheltered there. This is damping stuff.'

'Not yet,' she answered. 'I am as safe here. I hate the thought of having anything to screen the sea from me. I want to look—

at any moment the Indiaman or the man-of-war may come close to us.'

'Be it so,' said I. 'Heavens, how rapidly has all this happened! One of the cutter's men shouted to me that the Indiaman had fired two guns. Why did they not report this to us? Did they believe the swell would not let them get aboard? They saw—of course they saw—this fog bearing down; why did not the madmen let us know of it?'

'What will my aunt think?'

'Why, she will be in a terrible fright. But it will not last. We shall be picked up presently. I would rather be here than in the cutter. If they are wise, they will ride to their oars; if they row or allow the wind and seas to drive them, they are bound to lose both ships, the night being at hand; and then God help them!'

'Oh, it was an evil moment,' she cried, 'when we sighted the corvette!'

'It was an evil moment,' I exclaimed bitterly and wrathfully, 'when Mr. Colledge, who had undoubtedly taken too much wine on board the *Magicienne*, suggested that we should kill an hour on this hull. Where,' I cried passionately, 'could the unhappy lieu-

tenant's wits have been? He laughed at me for indicating the appearance I witnessed in the north-west. Was there nothing in the weight of this swell to convince him that there must be mischief not far off?'

'What will my aunt think?' she repeated, as though she scarcely heeded my words, whilst she brought her hands, brilliant with rings, together and stared into the thickness with her eyes on fire with fear and amazement and the score of wild emotions which filled her.

Though I held my peace on the subject, the wind, that was blowing with the spite of an ugly squall, was exciting an alarm in me that rose above all other considerations of our situation. The hatches lay open and there was nothing to be seen of their covers about the decks. If this weather continued, a high sea must presently follow, in which case there could be nothing to save the wreck from filling and foundering. The lieutenant had assured us that she was dry; but it was certain that she had been badly wrenched by the lightning stroke that had dismasted and apparently set her on fire forward, and by the furious gale that had chased her afterwards;

and though she may have been tight when the lieutenant overhauled her, this constant working in the strong swell might at any instant cause her to start a butt or open a seam, and then what should I be able to do? Both pumps were smashed level to the deck; there was no boat; there was nothing discoverable fore and aft which I could launch and secure my companion and myself to. It was with inexpressible anxiety, therefore, that I would send my gaze from time to time to windward, in the hope of observing a thinning in the thickness there, or any the faintest imaginable sign to elate me with the belief that the worst of the fog was on us, that we were now feeling the worst of the wind, and that the ocean would be clearing soon.

The time passed. I looked at my watch after we had been sitting a little, and found it six o'clock. The sun would be setting in something more than an hour, and a bitter black night was bound to follow if the vapour had not cleared when daylight ended. There was now a smart sea running, but the swell had flattened something, I thought. The hull was horribly frisky, leaning at desperate angles from side to side, and often recovering

herself with a jerk that must have flung us to the deck had we not been seated. But she was extraordinarily light, and floated very tall, and though there would sometimes come a blow of salt water against the bow that flashed across the deck in a mass of foam and green crystals, yet she soared so nimbly to the height of every surge that she took in amazingly little water. Indeed, it was not long before I felt myself infinitely comforted by her behaviour, convinced that it would have to breeze up with much more spite than the wind now had to put us in jeopardy from a filling hold.

Shortly before the hour of sundown, I induced Miss Temple to occupy the deck-house. She entered with a great deal of reluctance, and seated herself in a corner that was the furthest away from where the body had been. It had not been very easy to converse outside. The ceaseless roaring and washing noises of the water, with the alarming thumps and leapings of froth at the bow, and the sounds of the rushing wind sweeping in gusty cries over the mutilated rails of the hull as she was hove up full into it, and then sinking into a sort of humming moaning as

the wreck drove down the liquid acclivity into the swift comparative stillness of the trough: all this was distracting and terrifying, and speech had been difficult. But the interior of the deck-house was a shelter to the ear and voice. I seated myself opposite the girl, giving her as wide, respectful a berth as the narrow cabin permitted. The shadow of the evening lay already sullen in the white mist that seemed to boil upon the wind, though at that hour it was not so thick but that the gaze might be able to penetrate a distance of a quarter of a mile. Miss Temple was deadly pale. Even her lips had lost their delicate rosy tint, and sat blanched in their compression. Her eyes looked preternaturally large, and there was an expression of passionate desperation in them, as one might figure of some proud, high-spirited creature driven at bay, and rounding upon the pursuer with a gaze charged with despair and wrath and the misery of some heart-breaking resolution.

'I believe I shall go mad,' she said, 'if this fog does not cease. I feel as though I were now insane, and that what we are suffering is the imagination of madness.'

'It is a frightful time of suspense,' I an-

swered ; 'we must have patience : there is no other medicine for this sort of affliction.'

'I could stab myself,' she cried, 'for being in this position. There is the Indiaman close at hand ; I see her saloon cheerful with lamplight, the tables glittering, the passengers seated, talking and laughing, without a thought of us by this time.' I shook my head. She continued : 'I think of the security, the comfort of that ship, which I never once reflected on when in her. And now contrast this!'

She rolled her wonderful eyes over the narrow compartment in a shuddering way that was eloquent with abhorrence.

'Why am I here? It is my own fault. I could stab myself for my folly.'

It made one think of some beautiful wild creature newly caged to watch her.

'It is bad enough,' said I ; 'but it might be much worse. Think of yourself in that open boat—on this high sea, and amidst this blinding vapour: no water, no food, the blackness of the night coming down, and a thousand leagues of ocean all around you.'

'Is not the cutter safer than this horrible wreck?' she cried. 'If the morning exposes

the ships to the people in her, they can row ; but what can we do ? '

' If the morning exposes the ships,' said I, ' they'll see us, and very joyfully attempt to fetch us—that is to sail to us.'

She turned to look through a window the glass of which was gone, and through which the wind was shrilling as though it blew into a cylinder. It was fast darkening. In these latitudes twilight is brief, and in such weather as this there would be none. It was little more now than sombre blank greyness outside, with a sight of the steel-coloured swell, over whose humps the seas were rushing in foam, shouldering and vanishing into the thickness. But there was no increase in the wind, and the run of the surge did not gain in weight.

I watched the girl while she looked through the window. It is not in language to convey the tragic irony that was put into our situation by her sparkling holiday attire. Her dress was of some white material, of a silken or lustrous nature, that most perfectly fitted the beauties of her person. Her hat was some rich combination of richly plumed straw. She had removed her gloves on de-

scending into the cabin of the hull when we boarded her, and many rings of splendour and value flashed on her fingers in a very armour of jewels and gold. There were gems in her ears, and a heavy chain of gold round her neck, terminating in a whole cluster of trinkets at her girdle, in which was sheathed a watch of the size of her thumb-nail. Think of this glittering figure, this stately, most perfect shape of womanhood in the gloom of the strong, rude interior of the deck-house, with its few rough details of fittings in the shape of a table and lockers, nothing to see through the window but the rough deck spreading naked to its splinters of bulwark, with the angry foam of waters beyond, and a near sky of fast blackening vapour!

'What are we to do?' she exclaimed, resuming her former attitude and fixing her large desperate eyes upon me.

'We must wait,' said I.

'You have been a sailor, Mr. Dugdale; tell me what you think?'

'Well, first of all, we must be prepared to spend the night on this wreck'—— She flashed her hands to her face and held them there, and I waited for her to look at me

again. 'This weather,' I proceeded, 'is not likely to last very long. The dawn will probably exhibit a clear sky. If the ships are not in sight'—she drew in her breath with an hysterical 'Oh'—'they will still have the bearings of the wreck, and search for us. Were there but a single vessel to hunt after the hull, we might still feel perfectly safe; but there are two, and one of them is an English man-of-war.'

'But will Sir Edward Panton know that we are here?'

'No doubt. He or others will have seen the cutter deviate for the wreck instead of pulling for the Indiaman.'

'But they may think we are in the boat; and if she is not recovered, they will search for her, and not trouble themselves about the wreck.'

'We must be hopeful, and we must be patient,' said I.

It was now rapidly growing dark. The white waters showed ghastly over the edge of the bare deck to each convulsive jerking roll of the hull, and my companion's white face was little more than a glimmer in the gloom of the corner in which she sat. The thought

of the long black hours which lay before us was intolerable. I looked about me for a lamp, but there was nothing of the kind, nor hook nor bracket to prove that a lamp or lantern was ever used in this small abode. I told Miss Temple that I would go below and search for something wherewith to make a light.

'Will you be long?' she asked.

'I'll make haste,' said I.

'Yes, if you please, Mr. Dugdale,' she exclaimed.

I had in my pocket the old-fashioned arrangement of tinder-box and sulphur matches, being, indeed, too confirmed a smoker to stir very far without that convenience. The mere descent of the steps was a horrible labour, owing to the extravagant leaps and rolls of the mere shell of wreck, and my progress was scarcely more than inch by inch, forced to hold on as I was with the tenacity of the grip of a parrot's beak. The straining noises in the cabin might have easily led me to suppose that the hull was going to pieces. Every blow of the sea trembled through her down here as though the fabric forward were breaking up, and I recollect swinging by a

stanchion for some minute or two, overwhelmed with the consternation excited in me by the sounds, and by a sudden recollection of the lieutenant's words that the brig in her forecastle had been burnt out. But I had promised Miss Temple to be speedy; and the thought of her sitting lonely above in terror and despair brought my mind back to its bearings.

It was almost pitch-dark, but remembering the situation of the pantry in which the lieutenant had cracked the bottle of wine, I dropped on my hands and knees, not daring to trust my feet, and crawled towards it. When I guessed by groping that I was near the door, I kindled a match and entered the pantry; and after consuming about half-a-dozen matches, I met with a tin box that was full of long wax candles, which looked to me very much like a sample of booty, as it was scarcely to be supposed that a vessel of the class of the *Aspirante* would lay in stores of that quality. I hunted for a candlestick, and found a small empty pickle bottle, which would very well answer the purpose of holding the candle. This I squeezed under my waistcoat, and filled my coat-pockets with a

couple of bottles of wine, a handful of ship's biscuit, and a little tin drinking-vessel; and then putting the box of candles under my arm, I fell again upon my hands and knees, crawled to the cabin ladder, and joined the deck-house so wearied by the posture I had been forced to adopt and by the convulsive motions of the deck, which had put an aching as of rheumatism into every bone, that I was forced to sit and remain quiet for some minutes.

The wind swept in through the denuded windows; but the structure, as I have before said, was long in proportion to its width, and at the fore-end the atmosphere was quiet enough for a candle to burn in. I secured the empty pickle bottle to a stanchion with my handkerchief, and placed the lighted candle in it; and the square of the bottle held the flame at a sufficient distance from the stanchion to provide against all risk of fire. The light seemed to raise some little heart in Miss Temple.

'You are brave,' she exclaimed, with a glance at the black square of the hatch, 'to descend into that dreadful dungeon. There may be dead bodies there.'

'I am not afraid of dead bodies,' said I. 'I wish there were nothing more harmful in this world than dead men. Here are two bottles of wine and some biscuit. You will be the better for a little refreshment.'

I knocked off the head of a bottle and handed her a draught. She looked at the rough drinking-vessel for a little, and then said with a painful smile: 'A desperate change, Mr. Dugdale, from the table of the Indiaman! Will this wine hurt me?'

'I will drink first, to reassure you, if you please,' said I.

'No,' she exclaimed; 'I must not be too cowardly;' and she drank.

I took a good drain myself, and found it the same noble wine that the poor lieutenant had tasted.

'Try one of these biscuits, Miss Temple,' said I; 'they are but coarse eating for you, I fear; they are the bread that poor Jack is fed on.'

She took one and nibbled at it.

'Ha!' said I, 'this is an ocean experience indeed. This is being shipwrecked. You will have a deal more to talk about when you get home than Colledge could have dreamt of

in proposing this excursion for that purpose. Can you bite that biscuit?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'It is rather flinty,' said I, munching. 'There should be something more relishable than this to be come at below. I will make another hunt.'

'No, if you please,' she cried vehemently; 'do not leave me, Mr. Dugdale.'

'Ay, but food apart, since we must needs remain here through the night, I must endeavour to find something soft for you to lie upon. You cannot rest upon that hard locker.'

'Oh, I do not want to rest,' she exclaimed. 'Do you think I could sleep? I shall sit as I am, and pray for the light to come and for a sight of the ships.'

I made no answer, though it was on the tip of my tongue to say I was sorry for her sake that it was I, and not Colledge, whom she was adrift with. It was an impulse coming through some sudden hot recollection of her treatment of me on board the *Countess Ida*; but I bit my lip, and was grateful for my silence a moment after, when I saw her fine eyes swimming with tears.

'Pray have hope,' I exclaimed. 'I am sure after a bit you will find plenty of courage in your heart to confront this little passage, hard as it is. I will do what I can. I would you had a better sailor than I by your side; but what can be done by me shall be done, and the worst is a long way off yet, I am certain.'

She put her hands upon the table and hid her face in them. I lifted the lid of the locker I was using as a seat, to stow away the bottles in a safe place; for, talk as I might, it was only God could know whether it might not end in a single drop of the liquor becoming more precious to us than twenty times the value of the cargo of the Indiaman. There were some wearing apparel, a few small coils of ratline-stuff, and other odds and ends in the locker, but nothing noticeable. I then clawed my way to the deck-house door to take a look round. It was black as fog and darkness could make it. Close alongside, the foam glanced dimly, with now and again a flash of phosphoric light in some dark coil down whose slope the hull was sliding; but there was nothing else to see. The wind still blew fresh, but there was no recognisable

increase in it since the hour of its first coming down upon the wreck. It made a most dismal and melancholy noise of howling in the sky, as it swept through the dark obscurity, splitting upon the foremast and the shrouds which supported the spar, in a low-toned long-drawn shriek, which had something of the sound of a human note as it pierced through the hissing and seething round about, and through the strange, low, dull thunder made by the shouldering of liquid folds coming together as they ran, and by the hurl of the surge as it rounded and dissolved into foam.

There could be very little doubt that the drift of a light empty shell of a wreck with a yard and mast and shrouds forward for the wind to catch hold of would be considerable in such weather as this. Helped by the beat of the seas, she might easily blow dead to leeward, in the trough as she was, at the rate of some three to four miles in the hour, so that daybreak would find her forty or fifty miles distant from the spot where we had boarded her. However, I comforted myself with the reflection that the commanders of the two ships would have a clear perception of such a

drift as I calculated, and allow for it in the search they would surely make for the hull. I had but one fear: that the cutter had been seen leaving the wreck, for there was an interval at least of a minute or two between her dropping astern and manœuvring with her three oars and her envelopment by the fog. If, then, she had been sighted, the inference would inevitably be that Miss Temple, Colledge, and myself were in her; and so the hunt would be for the cutter, without reference to the hull, with every prospect of the search carrying the ships miles below the verge of our horizon.

Meanwhile, as I stood in that doorway looking into the blackness over the sides, I bent my ear anxiously forward; but though there were constant shocks of the sea smiting the bow, I never caught the noise of water falling in weight enough upon the deck to alarm me. The leap of the surge seemed to be always forward of the fore-shrouds, and the ducking and tossing of the fabric was so nimble, and the pouring of the blast so steadfast, that nearly all the water that sprang to the blow of the bow was carried overboard by the wind. This was about as comforting an

assurance as could come to me; for I tell you it was enough to turn one's heart into lead to look into that starless wall of blackness close against the ship, to see nothing but the pallid glimmer of froth, to hearken to the noises in the air, to feel the sickening and dizzy heavings of the sea, and then realise that this hull had been struck by lightning, that the forepart of her was burnt into a thin case of charred timbers, and that all three hatches in her, together with the skylight, lay open and yawning like the mouths of wells to the first rush of sea that should tumble over the side.

I will not feign to remember how that night passed. The tall wax candle burnt bravely and lasted long; but the guttering of it to the circlings of the air in the extremity of the cabin obliged me to light another before the night was spent. It a little encouraged Miss Temple to be able to see. God knows how it might have been with her had we been obliged to sit in that blackness. Once the candle was blown out, and when I had succeeded in lighting it afresh, after a few minutes of groping and hunting and manœuvring with my tinder-box, I looked at the girl, and knew by the horror that shone in her eyes, and the

marble hardness in the aspect of her parted lips, as though her mouth were some carved expression of fear, how heart-subduing had that short spell of blackness proved. From time to time she would ask for a little wine, which she sipped as though thirsty, but she swallowed a few drops only, as if she feared that the wine, by heating her, would increase her thirst; yet when I spoke of going below to seek for some fresh water, she begged me not to leave her.

'It is the memory of the body that sat at this table which makes loneliness insupportable to me, Mr. Dugdale,' she exclaimed. 'I seemed to see the dreadful object when the candle went out. I thought I had more spirit. I am but a very weak woman, after all.'

'I do not think so,' said I; 'you are bearing this frightful trial very nobly. How would it be with some girls I know? They would be swooning away; they would be exhausting themselves in cries; they would be tearing themselves to pieces in hysterics. And how is it with me? Sometimes I am frightened to death, but not with fears of darkness or of the dead. I am certain we shall be rescued; this hull is making excellent

weather of it; there is food and drink below, yet I am filled with consternation and grief. Why should it be otherwise? We are creatures of nerves, and this is an experience to test the courage of a saint.'

Well, we would exchange a few sentences after this pattern, and then fall silent for a whole hour at a time. She never closed her eyes throughout the night. Whenever I glanced at her, I met her gaze brilliant with emotion. The change was so sudden that I found it impossible to fully realise it. When I thought of Miss Temple aboard the *Countess Ida*, her haughtiness, her character of almost insolent reserve, how she had hardly found it in her to address me with an accent of courtesy, her ungracious treatment of me after the service I had done her in rescuing her from a perilous situation: I say when I recalled all this and a deal more, and then viewed her as she sat opposite, crouching in a corner, supporting herself by grasping the table with her heavily ringed fingers, the high-born delicate beauty of her lineaments showing like some cameo in ivory, and reflected that she and I were absolutely alone, that it might come to her owing her life to

me, or that we might be doomed to miserably perish together—this girl, this unapproachable young lady, at whom I had been wont to stare furtively with fascinated eyes on board the Indiaman for long spells at a stretch —I could not bring my mind to credit the reality of our situation.

CHAPTER XX

I SEARCH THE WRECK

All night long it blew a strong wind, but shortly before daybreak it fined down on a sudden into a light air out of the south-west, leaving a troubled rolling sea behind it. It was still very thick all round the horizon, so that from the door of the deck-house my gaze scarcely penetrated a distance of two miles. It was no longer fog, however, but cloud, sullen, low-lying, here and there shaping out; a familiar tropical dawn in the parallels, though it made one think too of the smothers you fall in with on the edge of the Gulf Stream.

I stepped on deck to wait for the light to break, and Miss Temple came to the door to look also. The hull still rolled violently, but without the dangerous friskiness of the jumps, recoils, and staggering recoveries of the night when there was a sharp sea running as well as a long heaving swell. My heart was in my

gaze as the dim faintness came sifting into the darkness of the east. In a few minutes it was a grey morn, the sea an ugly lead, and the horizon all round of the aspect of a drizzling November day in the English Channel. We both swept the water with our sight, again and again looking, straining our vision into the dim distances; but to no purpose.

'Do you see anything?' exclaimed Miss Temple.

'No,' I answered, 'there is nothing in sight.'

'Oh, my heart will break!' she cried.

'We must wait awhile,' said I: 'this sort of weather has a trick of clearing rapidly, and it may be all bright sky and wide shining surface of ocean long before noon; then we shall see the ships, and they will see us. But this is a low level. Something may heave into view from the height of that mast. I shall not be long gone. Be careful to hold on firmly, Miss Temple; nay, oblige me by sitting in the deck-house. Should you relax your grasp, a sudden roll may carry you overboard.'

In silence, and with a face of despair, she took her seat on a locker, and very warily I made my way forwards. We had taken but

a brief view of the hull when we boarded her, and the appearance of her towards the bows was new to me. There were twenty signs of her having been swept again and again by the seas. No doubt, her hatches had been uncovered, that her people might rummage her before going away in her boats; and the covers, for all I could tell, might have been rolled overboard by some of her violent workings. Yet it was certain that she must have been swept when her hatches were covered, or the lieutenant would not have found her with a dry hold. But I had been long enough at sea to know that it is the improbable conjecture that oftenest fits the fact of a marine disaster.

I took a view of the foremast, to make sure that all was sound with it, and then sprang into the shrouds and gained the top. Some few feet of the splintered topmast still stood, and under the platform at which I had arrived the fore-yard swang drearily to its overhauled braces hanging in bights. There was no more to see here than from the deck. The thick atmosphere receded nothing to this elevation, and would have been as impenetrable had I climbed a thousand feet. It was like

being in the heart of an amphitheatre of sulky shadows. The water rolled foamless, and there was little more air to be felt than was made by the sickeningly monotonous swing of the solitary spar from whose summit I explored the ocean limits in all directions, frowning to the heart-breaking intensity of my stare. By heaven, then, thought I, we *are* alone! and if we are to be picked up by either of the ships, it will not be to-day nor maybe to-morrow!

I glanced down at the deck of the hull, and observed that the sides of the fore-hatch were black with extinguished fire. The head-rail was gone to port, and from the eyes of her to the deck-house aft the fabric had a fearfully wrecked look, with its mutilated bulwark stanchions, its yawning hatchways, its dislocated capstan, and other details of a like kind, all helping to a horrible wildness of appearance to one who viewed, as I did, from an eminence, the crazy, fire-blackened, dismasted old basket, that wallowed as though every head of swell that rolled at her must overwhelm and drown her hollow interior.

I again sent my eyes in another passionate search, then descended. As I sprang from the

shrouds on to the deck, my eye was taken by the brig's bell, that dangled from a frame close against the foremast. Dreading lest some increase in the swell should start it off into ringing in some dismal hour of gloom and heighten Miss Temple's misery and terror, I unhooked the tongue of it, and threw it down, and rejoined my companion, whose white face put the piteous question of her heart to me in silence.

'No,' said I, swaying in front of her as I held on to the door; 'there is nothing to be seen.'

'Oh it is hard! it is hard!' she cried. 'If one could only recall a few hours—be able to go back to yesterday! I do not fear death: but to die thus—to drown in that dreadful sea—no one to be able to tell how I perished.' She sobbed, but with dry eyes.

There was no reasoning with such a fit of despair as this, nor was it possible for me to say anything out of which she might extract a grain of comfort, seeing that I could but speak conjecturally, and with no other perception than was to be shaped by the faint light of my own hopes. My heart was deeply moved by her misery. Her beauty showed wan, and

was inexpressibly appealing with its air of misery. The effects of the long and fearful vigils of the night that was gone were cruelly visible in her. There was a violet shadow under her eyes, her lips were pale, her lids drooped, her hair hung in some little disorder about her brow and ears; her very dress seemed significant of shipwreck, mocking the eye with what the grim usage of the sea had already transformed into mere ironical finery. Yet there was too much of the nature she had familiarised me to on board the Indiaman still expressed in the natural haughty set of her lips, even charged as they were with the anguish that worked in her, to win me to any attempt of tender reassurance. I watched her dumbly, though my soul was melted into pity. Presently she looked at me.

'I suppose there is nothing to be done, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Indeed, then,' said I, 'there is a deal to be done. First of all, you must cheer up your heart, which you will find easy if you can credit me when I tell you that this hull is perfectly buoyant; that though the weather is thick and gloomy, the sun, as he gains power, is certain to open out the ocean to us;

that there are two ships close at hand searching for us; that there are provisions enough below to enable us to support life for days and perhaps weeks; and that, even if the Indiaman or the corvette fail to fall in with us, we are sure to be sighted by one of the numerous vessels which are daily traversing this great ocean highway. What, then, are we to do but compose our minds, exert our patience, keep a bright lookout, be provided with means for signalling our distress, and meanwhile not to suffer our unfortunate condition to starve us? And that reminds me to overhaul the pantry for something better than biscuit to break our fast with.'

A softness I should have thought impossible to the spirited fires of her eyes when all was well with her entered her gaze for a moment as it rested upon me, and a faint smile flickered upon and vanished off her lips; but she did not speak, and I dropped through the hatch to ascertain if the pantry could yield us something more nourishing than ship's bread.

The sullenness of the day without lay in gloom below. I was forced to return for a candle, with which I entered the little cabin

that I had visited on the previous day; but when I came to make a search I could find nothing more to eat than cheese, biscuit, and marmalade. There was a number of raw hams, but the galley was gone, and there was no means to cook them. There were two casks of flour, a sack of some kind of dried beans, and a small barrel of moist sugar. These matters had probably been overlooked when the crew hurriedly removed themselves from the brig. No doubt, at the time of jettisoning such commodities as the hold might have stored, they had broken out as much food and water as they could take with them. There was more than a bottle of wine in the deck-house; down here, stowed away in straw and secured by a batten, were some three or four scores of full bottles, all, I supposed, holding the same generous liquor contained in the first of them we had tasted. But there was no fresh water. I sought with diligence, but to no purpose. Possibly the people might have left some casks of it in the hold; but that was a search I would not at present undertake.

I took some cheese and marmalade and another handful of biscuits, along with a knife

and a couple of tin dishes. As I passed through the cabin, the light of the candle I held glanced upon a stand of small-arms fixed just abaft the short flight of the hatch-ladder. There were some thirty to forty muskets of an old-fashioned make, even for those days, and on either hand of them, swinging in tiers or rows from nails or hooks in the bulkhead, were a quantity of cutlasses, half-pikes, tomahawks, and other items of the grim machinery of murder. I placed the food upon the deck-house table.

'A shabby repast, Miss Temple,' said I, 'but we may easily support life on such fare until we are rescued.'

She ate some biscuit and marmalade, and drank a little wine; but she incessantly sent her gaze through the windows or the open door, and sighed frequently in tremulous respirations, and sometimes there would enter a singular look of bewilderment into the expression of her eyes, as though her mind at such moments failed her, and did but imperfectly understand our situation. I would then fear that the horror which possessed her might end in breaking down her spirits, and even dement her, indeed. Already her eyes

were languid with grief and want of rest, and such strength and life as they still possessed seemed weakened yet by the shadowing of the long fringes. I endeavoured to win her away from her thoughts by talking to her.

I possessed a pocket-book, which supplied me with pencil and paper, and I drew a diagram of the two ships' and the wreck's position, as I was best able to conceive it, and made arrows to figure the direction of the wind, and marked distances in figures, and enlarged freely and heartily upon our prospects, pointing with my pencil to the paper whilst I talked. This interested her. She came round to the locker on which I sat, and placed herself beside me, and leaned her face near to mine, supporting her head by her elbow whilst she gazed with eyes riveted to the paper, listening thirstily. I had never had her so close to me before saving that day when we swung together on to the hencoop, but then it was a constrained situation, and she had let me suspect that it was very distasteful to her. It was far otherwise now. She was near me of her own will; I felt her warm breath on my cheek; the subtle fragrance of her presence

was in the air I respired. I talked eagerly to conceal the emotions she excited, and I felt the blood hot in my face when I had made an end with my diagram, and drew a little away to restore the book to my pocket.

She now seemed able and willing to converse, but she did not offer to leave my side.

'Suppose the ships are unable to find us, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Some other vessel is certain to fall in with us.'

'But she may be bound to a part of the world very remote from India or England.'

'True,' said I; 'but as she jogs along she may encounter a vessel proceeding to England, into which we shall be easily able to tranship ourselves.'

'How tedious! We may have to wander for months about the ocean!'

'It is always step by step, Miss Temple, in this life. Let us begin at the beginning, and quit this wreck, at any rate.'

'All my luggage is in the Indiaman. How I am to manage I cannot conceive,' said she, running her eyes over her dress, and lifting her hand to her hat.

'Pray let no such consideration as dress

trouble you. The experience will gain in romance from our necessities, and we shall be able to read 'Robinson Crusoe' with new enjoyment.

She faintly smiled, with just a hint of peevishness in the curl of her lip.

'If this be romance, Mr. Dugdale, may my days henceforth, if God be merciful enough to preserve us, be steeped in the dullest prose.'

'I wonder where Colledge and the cutter's crew are?' said I.

'I do not think,' she exclaimed, 'if Mr. Colledge were in your place he would show your spirit.'

'He was a great favourite of yours, Miss Temple.'

'Not great. I rather liked him. I knew some of his connections. He was an amiable person. I did not know that he was engaged to be married.'

I was astonished that she should have said this, but I was eager to encourage her to talk, and in our state of misery it would signify but little what topic we lighted upon.

'Did he inform you he was engaged?' said I.

'No. I perceived it in his looks when his cousin asked him the question. Did he ever tell you who the young lady was?' she added listlessly, and though she spoke of the thing it was easy to see that she was without interest in it.

I could not tell a lie, and silence would have been injurious to my wishes for her. Besides, she had guessed the truth by no help from me, and then, again, our situation rendered the subject exquisitely trifling and insignificant.

'Yes,' I replied; 'we were cabin fellows, and intimate. He showed me the girl's portrait—a plump, pretty little woman. Her name is Fanny Crawley, daughter of one of the numberless Sir Johns or Sir Thomases of this age.'

She was looking through the cabin door at the sea, and scarcely seemed to hear or to heed me. Am I strictly honourable in this? thought I. Pshaw! it was no moment to consider the rights and wrongs of such a thing. Her discovery had freed me from all obligation of secrecy, and what I had supplied she would have easily been able to ascertain for herself on her return home, if, indeed,

home was ever to be viewed again by either of us.

'What horrible weather!' she exclaimed, bringing her eyes to my face; 'there is no wind, and the sea rolls like liquid lead. When you were at sea, were you ever in a situation of danger such as this?'

'This is an uneasy time,' said I; 'but do not call it a situation of danger yet. I am going shortly to overhaul the wreck. I must keep her afloat until we are taken off her.'

'How long were you at sea, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Two years.'

'Is your father a sailor?'

'No; my father is dead. He was captain in the 38th Regiment of Foot, and was killed at Burmah.'

There was a kind of dawning of interest in her eyes, an expression I had not noticed when she talked of Colledge and his engagement.

'My father was in the army, too,' said she; 'but he saw very little service. Is your mother living?'

'She is.'

She sighed bitterly, and hid her face whilst she exclaimed:

'Oh, my poor mother! my poor mother! How little she knows! And she was so reluctant to let me leave her.' She sighed again deeply, and let her hands fall, and then sank into silence.

I quitted the deck-house to take another look round. Just then rain began to fall, and the sea became shrouded with the discharge. So oil smooth now was the swell that each drop as it fell pitted the lead-coloured rounds with a black point, and the water alongside looked to be spotted with ink. As I had met with no fresh water in the little room that I call the pantry, and as there might be none in the hold, or none that with my single pair of hands I should be able to come at, I resolved to take advantage of the wet that was pouring down, and dived into the cabin to search for any vessel that would catch and hold it. The flour and sugar casks in the pantry would not do. I peered into the other berths, but could see nothing to answer the purpose. It was of the first consequence, however, to us that we should possess a store of drinking water to mix with

our wine, for we were in the tropics; the atmosphere was heavy with heat, even under a shrouded heaven; it was easy to figure what the temperature would rise to when the sun should shine forth; and the mere fancy of days of stagnation and of vertical suns, of this hull roasting under the central broiling eye, of the breathless sea, stretching in feverish breathings into the dim, blue distance, unbroken by any tip of sail, and no fresh water to drink, was horribly oppressive, and rendered me half crazy to find some contrivance to catch the rain, which might at any moment cease. The thought of the lockers in the deck-house occurred to me. I mounted the ladder and searched them, and to my unspeakable joy, found in the locker upon which Miss Temple had been seated during the night, four canvas buckets, apparently brand new, as I might judge, from the cloth and from the rope handles. The rain fell heavily, and the water gushed in streams from the roof of the deck-house at many points of it. In a very short time the buckets were filled, but they were of a permeable substance, and it was necessary to decant them as soon as possible. There was no difficulty in doing this, for there

were several empty bottles in the shelves below along with a couple of large jars, some tin pannikins, and so forth. These I brought up, washed them in the rain, and then filled them, and in this manner contrived to store away a good number of gallons, not to mention the contents of the buckets, which I left hanging outside to fill up afresh, meaning to use them first, and taking my chance of loss through the water soaking through them.

All this, that is to be described in a few lines of writing, signified a lengthy occupation, that broke well into the day. Miss Temple watched my labours with interest, and begged to be of service; but she could be of little use to me, nor would I suffer her to expose herself to the wet.

'Will not this rain fill the hull,' she exclaimed, 'and sink her?'

'It would need to keep on raining for a long while to do that,' said I, laughing. 'I am going below to inspect the forepart of her, and to ascertain, if possible, what her hold contains. Will you accompany me? The hull rolls steadily; you will not find walking inconvenient, and it is very necessary that you should occupy your mind.'

'I should like to do so,' she answered; 'but ought not one of us to stay here in case the sea should clear and show us the ships?'

'Alas!' said I, 'there is no wind, and the ships probably lie as motionless as we. This weather will not speedily clear, I believe. We shall not be long below, and any sort of exertion is better than sitting here in loneliness and musing upon the inevitable, and adding the misery of thought to the distress of our situation.'

'Yes, you are right,' she exclaimed, rising. 'You give me some heart, Mr. Dugdale, yet I do not know why. There is nothing that you can say to encourage me to hope.'

To this I made no reply, but took her hand, and assisted her to descend the ladder. She came to a stand at the foot of it, as though terrified by the gloom.

'It is dreadful,' she exclaimed in a low voice, 'to think that only a few short hours ago the poor lieutenant whose heart was beating high with thoughts of returning home, should have been laughing and joking—here! I can hear his voice still; I can hear Mr. Colledge's laughter. Hark! What noises are those?'

'Rats!' I exclaimed.

The squeaking was shrill and fierce and close to. I lighted a candle, she meanwhile coming to my side, her elbow rubbing mine, as though she would have my hand within an instant's reach of her own. The squeaking continued. It sounded as though there were some score of rats worrying something, or fighting among themselves.

'Hold this candle for a moment,' said I, and I advanced to the bulkhead and grasped a cutlass, and then peeped into the little passage that divided the after cabins. The rats were somewhere along it, but it was too dark to see; so laying the cutlass aside, I took down a musket and sent the heavy weapon javelin-fashion sheer into the thick of the hideous noise. A huge rat as big as a kitten rushed over my feet; Miss Temple uttered a shriek, and let fall the candle.

'Do not be alarmed!' I shouted; 'the beasts know their way below;' and seeing the pallid outline of the candle upon the deck I picked it up and relighted it.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she cried, in a voice that trembled with disgust and fear, 'what am I to do? I dare not be here, and I dare

not be above, alone. What is more shocking and terrifying than a rat?'

I told her that rats were much more afraid of us than we could possibly be of them; but, commiserating her alarm, I offered to escort her to the deckhouse.

'But you will not leave me there,' she exclaimed.

'It is very necessary,' said I, 'that I should examine the state of the hull.'

'Then I will stay with you,' said she. 'I cannot endure to be alone.'

She gathered up her dress, holding the folds of it with one hand, whilst she passed the other through my arm. I could feel her shuddering as she clung to me. Her eyes were large with fright and aversion, and they sparkled to the candle-flame as she rolled them over the deck. At the extremity of the passage that separated the foremost berths from the pantry stood what I believed a bulkhead; but on bringing the candle to it I discovered that it was a door of very heavy scantling that slided in grooves with a stout iron handle for pulling it by. It travelled very easily, as something that had been repeatedly used. The moment it was open there was plenty of

daylight, for the open square of the main hatch yawned close by overhead, of dimensions considerable enough to illuminate every part of this interior. I stood viewing with wonder a scene of extraordinary confusion. There were no hammocks, but all about the decks, in higgledly-piggledly heaps and clusters, were mats of some sort of West Indian reeds, rugs and blankets, bolster-shaped bags, a few sea-chests, most of them capsized, with their lids open, and a surprising intermixture of hook-pots, tin-dishes, sea-boots, oilskins, empty broken cases, staves of casks, tackles, and a raffle of gear and other things of which my mind does not preserve the recollection. Several large rats, on my swinging the door along its grooves, darted from out of the various heaps and shot with incredible velocity down through the large hatch that conducted into the hold, and that lay on a line with the hatch above.

'By all that's—— Well, well! here's been excitement, surely,' said I. 'Was ever panical terror more incomparably suggested? But this brig was full of men, and there was manifestly a tremendous scramble at the last. Would not anyone think that there had been a fierce fight down here?'

'Do you think there are any dead bodies under those things?' exclaimed Miss Temple in a hollow whisper.

'See!' cried I; 'lest there should be more rats about, suppose I contrive some advantage for you over the beasts;' and so saying I dragged one of the largest of the sea-chests to the bulkhead and helped her to get upon it.

This seemed to make her easier. Filled as my mind was with conflicting emotions excited by the extraordinary scene of hurry and disorder which I surveyed, I could yet find leisure to glance at and deeply admire her fine, commanding figure, as she stood with inimitable, unconscious grace, swaying upon the chest to the regular rolling of the hull. It was a picture of a sort to live as long as the memory lasted. There she stood, draped in the elegancies of her white apparel, her full, dark eyes large and vital again in the shadow of her rich hat, under which her face showed colourless and faultless in lineament as some incomparable achievement of the sculptor's art: her beauty and dignity heightened in a manner not to be expressed or explained by the character of the scene round about—the uncovered square of hatch through which the

rain was falling, the wild disorder of the deck, the rude beams and coarse sides of the interior.

I approached the edge of the hatchway and looked down. Little more was to be seen than ballast, on the top of which lay a couple of dismounted guns, apparently twelve-pounders. A short distance forward in the gloom were the outlines of some casks and cases. The hull was dry, as the lieutenant had said. Water there undoubtedly must have been, washing to and fro under the ballast and down in the run, but too inconsiderable in quantity to give me the least uneasiness. One glance below sufficed to assure me that the fabric of the wreck was tight.

I considered a little whether it might not be possible to so protect the yawning hatches as to provide against any violent inroads of water should this dirty shadow of weather that overhung the wreck in wet end in wind; but there were no tarpaulins to be seen, no spare planks or anything of a like kind which could be converted into a cover, nothing but mats and rugs, which were not to be put to any sort of use in the direction I had in my mind.

I left Miss Temple standing on the chest, darting alarmed glances at the huddled heaps which littered the decks, and walked forward to a doorway in a stout partition that bulk-headed off a short space of forecastle from these 'tweendecks. There was an open forescuttle here that made plenty of light. This was the interior that had been burnt out, as the lieutenant had told me, to the condition of a charred shell. The deck and sides were as black as a hat, and the place showed as if it had been constructed of charcoal. A strong smell as of fire still lingered. Whatever had been here in the shape of sea-furniture was burnt, or removed by the people. I picked up a small handspike, and entering the cindery apartment, beat here and there against the semi-calcined planks, almost expecting to find the handspike shoot through; but black as the timber looked it yielded a hearty echo to my thumps, and I returned to Miss Temple satisfied that the hull was still very staunch, and, but for her uncovered hatches, as seaworthy as ever she had been at any time since her launch.

Whilst turning over some of the mats and wearing apparel on the deck with my foot I

spied a large cube of something yellow, and, picking it up and examining it, I was very happy to discover that it was tobacco. I made more of this than had I found a purse of a hundred guineas, for, though I had my pipe in my pocket, I was without anything to smoke, and I cannot express how hungrily during the night I had yearned for the exceeding solace of a few whiffs, and with what melancholy I had viewed the prospect of having to wait until we were rescued before I should obtain a cigar or a pipe of tobacco.

'What have you there, Mr. Dugdale?' cried Miss Temple.

'A little matter that, coming on top of the discovery that this hull is as good as a cork under our feet, helps very greatly towards re-establishing my peace of mind—a lump of very beautiful tobacco,' and I smelt it fondly again.

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale, I thought it was a dead rat,' she exclaimed. 'What are all those mats?'

'The privateersmen used them to sleep on, I expect. The quantity of them tells us how heavily manned this old waggon went.'

'There is no wind, Mr. Dugdale. The rain

falls in perfectly straight lines. Let us return to the deck-house.'

I took her hand and helped her to dismount. She gathered her dress about her as before, and passed with trepidation through the darksome cabin, holding tightly by my arm, and then, with a wearied despairful air, seated herself upon a locker and leaned her chin in her hand, biting her under lip whilst she gazed vacantly through the little window at the sullen raining gloom of the sky.

CHAPTER XXI

WE SIGHT A SAIL

I SHOULD but tease you by attempting to narrate the passage of the hours from this point. All day long it rained; no air stirred, and the leaden sea flattened into sulky heavings wide apart, on which the hull rolled quietly. Possessing but the clothes in which I stood, I fetched an oilskin from the 'tweendecks to save me from a wet skin, and thus attired made several journeys into the foretop, where I lingered, straining my gaze all around into the shrouded horizon till my eyeballs seemed to crack to the stretching of my vision. Sometimes, when in the deck-house, I would start to my feet on fancying I heard a sound of oars, but it was never more than some sobbing wash of swell, or some stir of the rudder swayed on its pintles by the movement of the fabric. There was plenty of stuff below with which to produce smoke, but no preparation

for such a signal could be made whilst it rained, nor could any purpose be served by having the materials ready until the weather cleared, and wind blew, and something hove into sight.

Miss Temple's miserable dejection grieved me bitterly. The horror of our situation seemed to increase upon her, and say what I might I never succeeded in coaxing the least air of spirit into her face. It was distressing beyond language to see this haughty, beautiful, high-born woman, accustomed to every refinement and elegance that was to be purchased or contrived, reduced to such a pass as this: languidly putting her lips to the rough pannikin in which I would hand her a draught of wine and water; scarcely able to bite the flinty biscuit which, with marmalade and cheese, formed our repasts; sitting for weary long spells at a time motionless in a corner of the rough structure, her eyelids heavy, her gaze fixed and listless, her lips parted, with all their old haughty expression of imperious resolution gone from them, her fingers locked upon her lap, her breast now and again rising and falling with hysteric swiftness to some wrenching emotion which yet found her face marble-like,

and her eyes without their familiar impassioned glow.

I recollect wondering once, whilst watching her silently, whether there would prove anything in this experience to change her character. Should the Indiaman recover us, there might be a full fourteen or even sixteen weeks of association before us yet. Once safely aboard the *Countess Ida*, would she let this experience slip out of her mind as an influence, and repeat in her manner towards myself the cold indifference, the haughty neglect, the distant supercilious usage which I had found so objectionable, that I was coming very near to as cordially hating her character as I deeply admired the beauties and perfections of her face and person. Was she not a sort of woman to accept an obligation and to look, if it suited her to do so, very coldly afterwards upon the person who had obliged her? Ridiculous as the emotion was at such a time, when, for all I knew, in a few hours the pair of us might be floating a brace of corpses, fathoms deep in that leaden ocean over the side, yet I must confess to a small stir of exultation to the thought that supposing us to be rescued, let her behave as she pleased,

she never could escape the memory of having been alone with me in this horrible hull, nor avert the discovery of this circumstance by her relatives and friends. It was a consideration, indeed, to bring her mightily closer to me than ever she had dreamt of, and to my mind it was as complete a turning of the tables as the most romantic fancy could have invented—that she who could scarce address me on board the Indiaman for pride, and for dislike too, for all I could tell, should now be in the intimate and lonely association of shipwreck with me, clinging to me, entreating me not to leave her side; dependent upon such spirit and energy as I possessed for the food and drink that was to support us, and again and again talking to me with a freedom which she would have exhibited to no living creature in the Indiaman, her aunt excepted.

When that second night came down black as thunder, raining hard, the ocean breathless, I entreated her to rest.

'You must sleep, Miss Temple,' said I; 'I will keep watch.'

She shook her head.

'Nay,' I continued, 'you will rest comfortably upon this locker. You need but a pillow.

There is nothing in the cabins to be thought of for that purpose; but I believe I can contrive a soft bolster for you out of my coat.'

'You are very kind, but I shall not be able to sleep.'

I continued to entreat her, and I saw she was affected by my earnestness.

'Since it will please you if I lie down, Mr. Dugdale, I will do so,' said she.

I whipped off my coat and rolled it up, and she removed her hat with a manner that made me see she abhorred even this trifling disturbance of her apparel, as though it signified a sort of settling down to the unspeakable life of the wreck. The fabric swayed so tenderly that the bottle containing the candle stood without risk of capsizal upon the table, and the small but steady flame shone clearly upon her. How delicate were her features by that light; how rich and beautiful the exceeding abundance of the dark coils of her hair, the richer and the more beautiful for the neglect in it, for the shadowing of her white brow by the disordered tresses, for the drooping of it about her ears, with the sparkle of diamonds there! Presently she was resting.

I removed the candle to the stanchion, and

secured the bottle where the light would be off her eyes, and sat me down near the doorway as far from her as the narrow breadth of the structure would permit, where I filled a pipe and smoked, expelling the fumes into the air, and listening with a heavy heart to the faint sounds breaking from the interior of the hull to the washing moan at long intervals of some passing heave of swell, and to the squeaking of the rats in the cabin below—a most dismal and shocking sound, I do protest, to hearken to amidst the hush and blackness of that ocean night, scarce vexed by more than the pattering of the rain.

From time to time Miss Temple would address me; then she fell silent, and by-and-by looking towards her, and observing her to lie motionless, I softly crept to abreast of her, keeping the table between, and found her sleeping.

It was then something after ten by my watch, and she slept for five hours without a stir, though now and again she spoke in her sleep. I know not why I should have remained awake unless it was to keep my weather-eye lifting for the rats. There was nothing to watch for or to hope for in such

weather as that. Once, when the beasts below were very noisy—for, as you will suppose, in that solemn stillness their squeakings rose with a singularly sharp edge to the ear—I bethought me of the pantry, and could not remember whether I had shut the door. For all I could yet tell, the stores we had to depend upon were in that little cabin, and if the rats found their way to the food, we might speedily starve. I lighted a second candle, that, should the girl suddenly awake, she might not find herself in the dark, and stepped below, and found the door closed. I opened it, and minutely surveyed the interior, and observing all to be well, shut the door and came away; but never can I forget the uncontrollable chills and shudders which seized me on passing through that cabin! I do not doubt my mind had been a little weakened. The remains of the mainmast pierced the deck, and stood like a pillar; it stirred to the movement of the candle in my hand, and I stopped with a violent start to gaze at it while the perspiration broke from my forehead. Vague indeterminable shapes seemed to flit past and about the stand of arms. The dull noises in the hold took to my alarmed

ear the notes of human groans. Several rats scurried in flying forms of blackness towards the after cabins: they seemed to start up through the deck at my feet!

When I resumed my seat on the locker, I was trembling from head to foot, and my heart beat with feverish rapidity. A draught of wine rallied me, and I tried to find something ridiculous in my fears. But all the same my dejection was as that of a man under sentence of death, and again and again I would put up a prayer to God for our speedy deliverance, whilst I sat hearkening to the noises below, to the steady pattering of the rain, to the occasional melancholy sob of water, and to the broken, unintelligible mutterings of the sleeping girl.

At some hour between three and four my companion awoke. She sat up with a cry of wonder, and by the candle-light I observed her staring around, with looks of astonishment and horror such as might appear in the face of a person who starts from some pleasant dream into the realities of a dreadful situation. I waited until she should have recollected herself, to use the fine expressive word of the old writers.

'I have been dreaming of home,' she said, in a low voice, 'of safety, of comfort, of everything that I am now wanting. What time is it, Mr. Dugdale?'

I put my watch close to my face and told her the hour.

'How black the night continues!' she said—'how silent, too!' she added, after hearkening awhile. 'It has ceased to rain, and there is not a breath of air.'

'It has not rained for these two hours past,' said I. 'I am impatient for the day to break. The horizon should be tolerably clear, if there be no rain; yet what can daybreak possibly disclose to us on top of such a night of stagnation as this has been?'

'Have you slept?'

'No.'

'Then you will take some rest now. It is my turn to watch.'

'The dawn will be breaking in a couple of hours,' said I; 'I will wait till it comes to take a look. Should nothing be in sight, I will endeavour to rest. You will not suffer in the daylight from the feeling of loneliness that would make you wretched now if I slept.'

'Whilst you are here, although sleeping, Mr. Dugdale, I should not feel lonely. Your voice assures me that you need sleep. I have been resting five hours. How patient you are!'

She took up my jacket, reformed it pillow-fashion, placed it on the locker where her own head had lain, and moved to make room for me, seating herself where my feet would about come.

'Pray lie down, Mr. Dugdale. I shall be closer to you here than you have been to me, and I can awaken you in an instant if there should be occasion to do so.'

I complied, rather to please her than to humour my own wishes; for though my eyelids had the heaviness of lead, there was a thrilling and hurrying of nervous sensation in me which were as good as a threat that I should not sleep. And so it proved, for after I had held my head pillowed for some half hour, I was still broad awake; and then growing impatient of my posture, I sat erect.

'No use, Miss Temple, I cannot sleep; and since that is so, pray resume this hard couch and finish out your slumbers.'

But this she would not do, protesting that she was fully rested. I was too desirous of her company to weary her with entreaties, and until the day broke we sat at that narrow table with the light close enough to enable us to see each other clearly. I remember saying to her:

'Since this is an experience you were fated to pass through—I suppose we must all believe in the pre-ordination of our lives—my sincere regret is that you should not have been imprisoned in this hull with somebody more agreeable to yourself than I.'

'Why do you say that?' she exclaimed, giving me a look that carried me back. 'In this state of misery a compliment would be shocking.'

'I seek no compliment,' said I. 'I am merely expressing a regret.'

'You regret that you are here?' she exclaimed. 'So do I, for then I should not be here. But since it is my lot to be here, I am satisfied with my companion; I would not exchange him for any other person on board the *Countess Ida*.'

I bowed.

'Should we be rescued,' she continued,

keeping her dark gaze full upon me as she spoke (and something of their beauty and brilliancy of light had returned to her eyes with her rest), 'I shall be deeply in your debt. My mother will thank you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'I have done nothing, Miss Temple. It is you who are now complimentary, and I fear ironical.'

She slightly shook her head and sighed, then remained silent for a minute or two, and said: 'How small and contemptible my spirit shows itself when I am tested! Do you recollect when this wretched brig was lying near us, how I took a parasol from my aunt and levelled it at this vessel and talked of wishing to see a sea-fight and of shooting a man? How brave I was when there was nothing particularly to be afraid of, and how cowardly I have shown myself here.'

'I should have scarcely believed,' said I, 'that you were sensible of my presence at the time you speak of.'

'Why?' she asked.

'Indeed,' I continued, 'I should have

scarcely believed that you were sensible that I was on board the ship.'

'Mr. Dugdale, if my manner did not please you, this is no time to reproach me with it.' Her eyes sparkled and her lip curled peevishly.

'Hark!' I exclaimed; 'I hear a rippling noise as of approaching wind.' I passed round the table, gained the door, and looked out. The atmosphere was still motionless, but the sounds of rippling drew near, and presently I felt a pleasant little air blowing over the stern of the hull, accompanied with the tinkling and lipping noises of water set in motion trembling to the brig's side. But it was still pitch dark, and search the sky where I would, I could observe no break of faintness, no leanest vision of star, no vaguest outline of cloud in the impenetrable obscurity.

I returned to the table, this time seating myself opposite to Miss Temple. It was easily seen in her face that she was sensible I did this consciously. Indeed, the gaze she rested upon me was a look of inquiry as though she would discover whether this holding aloof on my part was due to respect or to dislike. Then, as though she suddenly sickened to such idle considerations, she exclaimed with an

eager awakening of her in her whole manner, 'Does this breeze come from the direction where the ships are, or where you may suppose them to be, Mr. Dugdale?'

'For the life of me I could not tell you,' I responded; 'there are no quarters of the compass for human senses on such a night as this, in a hull that may be headed on all sorts of courses by the set of the swell; but the dawn will be here anon, and if this draught hold, we shall be able to find out whence it proceeds.'

It was still blowing the same light breeze when day broke, and I then knew that the wind sat about north-west. Miss Temple and I stepped on to the deck, where we stood in an agony of impatience awaiting the full revelation of the sea. One saw why it should have been so pitch dark throughout the night; the sky was overcast from horizon to horizon by a sheet of sallowish leaden-hued vapour. Yet the atmosphere had cleared so as to enable the sight to penetrate to the verge of the normal sea-line, where the ocean stood in a firm rim of the darkness of indigo in the east against the grey of the morning that was spreading out behind it. I took a long and

steady view of the circle; my companion's eyes were riveted upon me as I did so; she had rather trust my sight than hers, and her gaze glowed with an inexpressible eagerness to witness in my face an expression that should inform her I beheld a sail.

'It is the same inhuman abominable blankness as that of yesterday,' said I, fetching a deep breath of rage and grief; then shocked by the air of horror and despair in Miss Temple, I added: 'Yet this gives us a view of but little more than seven miles. Here is an air, surely, to whip something along. The ships of this ocean cannot all have rotted in yesterday's pestilential calm. Oh for such another telescope as Mr. Prance's!' and so saying I trudged forwards, and in a few minutes was sweeping the horizon from the elevation of the fore-top.

I ran my eyes slowly and piercingly along the sea-line, starting from the part into which the vessel's mutilated bowsprit pointed, and when my vision was over the starboard quarter, I beheld trembling upon the utmost verge of the livid waters stretching to the shrouded sky a minute fragment of white—a tip as of a seagull's pinion, but of a certainty a sail! I

lingered to make sure. Miss Temple watched me from abaft the deckhouse. My glance went to her for an instant, and I saw her bring her hands together and lift them, as though she witnessed in my posture that I descried something. My heart hammered violently in my ears, and my breathing was short and laboured.

'What do you see?' Miss Temple cried at last, her rich voice, tremulous with excitement and expectation, floating up like the notes of a flute.

'A sail!' I exclaimed, calling with an effort. 'Patience! I must stay here to make sure of the direction she is taking,' and I stood for a minute pointing while she strained her sight; but there was nothing for her to see down there.

The breeze had weight enough to determine the matter with some despatch, and I knew that if the sail were heading away from us, it must speedily vanish, so mere a speck was it that showed. Instead, though I will not say that it *grew* whilst I stood staring, it hung with a fixedness to satisfy me that the vessel was steering a course that must bring us into the sphere of her horizon; and not

having the least doubt of this, I dropped over the short futlock shrouds of the wreck and sprang on to the deck.

'It is a ship, Mr. Dugdale!' cried Miss Temple with something of an hysteric accent of inquiry in her voice.

'Assuredly,' I answered.

'Will she see us, do you think?'

'Ay, if she does not shift her helm. But we will *compel* her to see us.'

The girl suddenly grasped my hand in both hers, bowed her head over it, and I felt a tear. I was so affected that I stood looking, unable to speak. It was a sort of submission in its way. I cannot convey my thoughts of it. She was without her hat; I see her now as she bent over my hand; I feel the ice-cold pressure of her fingers, and recall the tears glittering through the beauty of her downcast lashes as they rose. She slowly lifted her large wet eyes to my face.

'What an experience this has been!' she whispered; 'how shall I be able to persuade people that I underwent it and lived?'

She still unconsciously held my hand. I put my lips to her fingers, and she released me.

'It must always be one of the very happiest memories of my life to me,' said I. 'I shall never make you believe in the joy your deliverance will fill me with.'

'Oh yes, yes!' she cried passionately; then sending a look over the quarter, she added: 'Are we not losing time? Is there not something we can do to summon her to us? Will it be long before she appears?'

'No; we are not losing time,' I answered. 'I shall have plenty of leisure to make a smoke, and that is what we must presently do. If she be the Indiaman or the corvette, all that is visible of her from yonder foretop is her royals. Her top-gallant sails, her topsails, and her courses will have to climb before her hull shows. Her speed to this air will not exceed four knots. She is probably twenty miles distant yet, and we must allow her, unless the breeze freshens, a good three hours to give us a full sight of herself on that horizon out there. So let us first get something to eat, Miss Temple, and then I will go to work.'

But our excitement was too strong to suffer us to make more than a phantom of a meal. A little biscuit soaked in wine formed my companion's breakfast, but her spirits

had returned to her; the remembered brilliancy was in her eyes again; a faint, most delicate flush was on her cheek; with unconscious fingers she caressed her hair as though, influenced by a womanly instinct of which she was insensible, she adjusted her tresses in preparation of our reception by the people of the ship. She was sure it was the *Countess Ida*. There was real gaiety in the laugh with which she said that she knew Mrs. Radcliffe's character, that she could well imagine how her aunt had tormented Captain Keeling, how ceaselessly the old lady would importune the captain to make haste and recover her niece.

'Oh, what a meeting it will be!' she cried.

'The sail may prove the corvette, though,' said I.

'But she will rescue us, Mr. Dugdale, and hunt after the Indiaman, and Sir Edward will put us on board of her.'

I left her to enter the 'tweendecks, where I collected a number of mats, blankets, staves of casks, and other material, which would burn and produce a thick smoke; and presently, with the assistance of Miss Temple, had a great heap of these things stacked on

deck betwixt the foremast and the mainhatch. It was a hard job to get the stuff to kindle, for the mats were damp and the staves not to be set on fire by a sulphur match. But on overhauling the lockers in the deck-house I found a tin can half full of oil and a small parcel of rags; and by means of these I set my bonfire alight. The planks of the deck were thick and wet, and securely calked, and the burning stuff was well clear of the hatch; there was no fear then, as I believed, of the fire penetrating the deck. It made a prodigious smoke. The mass of damp blankets and rags smouldered into a dark thick column, which mounted high ere it arched over to the wind. It was a signal to be sighted as far away as the ship was, and I stood watching it with transported eyes as it soared in belching folds gyrating into and blackening out upon the breeze till it showed like a steamer's smoke or a ship on fire.

I waited a little, and then got into the fore-shrouds to mark the sail afresh, and beheld the gleam of her canvas when I was still two or three ratlines below the futlock shrouds: good assurance, indeed, of her rising, and nimbly too, and heading square

for us. I strained my gaze at her from the height of the top, but she was far too remote to be distinguishable; nothing more, indeed, than a little ivory shaft against the sulky sallow of the sky.

It now occurred to me that I might accentuate the signal of the smoke by letting fall the foresail, for here was a space of canvas that would not only catch the eye, but suggest the hull as a still inhabited wreck that was on fire. I called to Miss Temple. She looked up eagerly.

'Do you see those ropes leading to the deck from the arms of this yard?' said I, pointing.

'Yes.'

'I want you to haul them taut, Miss Temple—gather in the slack to prevent the yard from swinging, as I mean to get upon it.'

She understood me perfectly. Her jewelled fingers flashed upon the rope as she threw the brace off the belaying pin, and I gazed down with a smile of deep admiration at her noble figure whilst she swayed at the line tightening and then belaying it again.

'You should have been a sailor's daugh-

ter,' I cried; 'there is the true skill of the ancient mariner in your trick of holding on with one hand and making fast with the other. Will you please now tighten the brace on the right-hand side.'

She did so, and I got upon the yard and, 'laying out' upon it, as it is called, severed with my knife the ropes with which the canvas was frapped to the spar, and down fell the sail with a large rent right amidships of it, though that signified nothing in a square of white that was to serve as a signal only. I descended to the deck.

'Why have you loosed that sail?' inquired Miss Temple. I explained. 'But will not the wreck now blow away from that ship?'

'No,' said I; 'she will fall off and come to. But the yard must be trimmed to achieve that.'

So saying I let go the weather-brace and swung the yard fore and aft as far as I could bring it, then overhauled the clew-garnets, that all there was of the sail might show. The hull slewed to the pressure, then hung quiet; meanwhile I continued to feed the blaze, heaping on rugs and blankets and so firing up that at times the smoke hung as thick to leeward as a thundercloud.

CHAPTER XXII

THE 'LADY BLANCHE'

So light was the breeze, that it was drawing on to ten o'clock in the morning before the approaching vessel lay plain on the sea. Long before this I had made her out to be a square-rigged craft, and sometimes I would imagine that she was the corvette, and sometimes that she was the *Countess Ida*. It had been a time of breathless expectation, of crushing suspense. Again and again had I mounted the rigging to make sure that she had not shifted her course, and was edging away from us. Again and again had I run my eyes round the sea with a passionate prayer in my heart that the wind might hold; for if it shifted, we stood to lose the ship; and if it fell, the calm might last all day, with the prospect of another black night before us and a deserted ocean at daybreak.

But now, drawing on to this hour of ten, the hull of the vessel had risen to its bends,

and though I might be certain of nothing else, it was absolutely sure that the stranger was neither the *Magicienne* nor the *Countess Ida*. She had puzzled me greatly for a considerable time; for even when her fore-course had fairly lifted she yet seemed to be rising more canvas. But by this hour I could distinguish. She was a small vessel, painted white—whether barque or ship I could not then tell. She had studdingsails out and skysails set, and showed as an airy delicate square of pearl; and indeed I might have believed that she was the Indiaman for that reason, until her snow-white body came stealing out to the stare I fixed upon her, and then I looked at Miss Temple.

Her sight for seafaring details was not mine. She was trembling as she said: 'Which ship is she, Mr. Dugdale?'

'Neither,' I answered.

'Neither!' she cried.

'Do not you observe that yonder craft has a white hull, and that she is a small ship? But what does it matter? She is bound to see us. She will rescue us; and, let the future be what it may, our one consuming need now is to quit this hull.'

She had so reckoned upon the stranger proving either the corvette or the Indiaman, that, had the approaching craft been no more than a mirage, had the fabric melted upon the air as we watched it, she could not have looked more blank, more wildly and hopelessly disappointed.

'Neither!' she repeated, breathing with difficulty. 'Oh, Mr. Dugdale, what are we to do?'

'Why, get on board of her, in the name of God,' I cried—'giving Him thanks when we are there.'

'But she may—she will be'—she paused, unable to articulate: then with an effort: 'She may be going to another part of the world.'

'It matters not,' I answered, observing with rapture that the vessel was heading more directly for us; 'she will put us aboard something homeward bound. Will not that be better than stopping here, Miss Temple?'

'Oh yes, oh yes!' she cried; 'but if we waited a little, the Indiaman might find us.'

'Heaven forbid! we have waited long enough.'

So speaking, I rushed forward, picked up

the handspike with which I had beaten upon the forecastle wall, secured a blanket to it, and, dancing aft, fell to flourishing it with all my might. Very slowly the vessel came floating down upon us with a light swaying of her trucks from side to side, and a tender twinkling of the folds of her lower canvas, which there was not weight enough in the wind to hold distended. Her hull was exceedingly graceful, and of a milky whiteness; and, as she leaned from us on some wide fold of the breathing waters, she exposed a hand's-breadth of burnished copper, which put a wonderful quality of beauty and delicacy into the whole fabric, as though she were a little model in frosted silver.

'Before she takes us on board, Mr. Dugdale,' exclaimed Miss Temple, 'will not you mount the rigging to see if there is another ship in sight that may prove the Indiaman?'

'But even if the Indiaman were in sight,' said I, 'we should seize this the first of our opportunities to escape from this floating tomb. For heaven's sake, let us get aboard that fellow!'

As I spoke, I seized the handspike again and frantically flourished it. All this while

there was a column of smoke ascending steadily from my fire of rugs and mats and darkening the sea over the starboard bow. I was now able to make out that the coming craft was a barque. My eyes were glued to her; my heart thumped furiously; the wildest alternations of joy and dread seized me. Suppose she should prove some foreigner in charge of a man indifferent to human life, some cold-blooded miscreant who had shifted his helm merely to satisfy his curiosity, and who, on perceiving that the smoke was no more than a signal, and that the wreck floated high, should slide quietly on and leave us to our fate? Such things had been; such things were again and again happening. As she drew with a snail-like motion abreast without touching a brace, without any signs of movement about her deck, my eyes turned dim; I feared I was about to swoon.

'Will she not stop?' exclaimed Miss Temple, in a voice of terror.

Lifting the handspike with its fluttering blanket high above my head, I waved it furiously for some moments, then flinging it down upon the deck, applied my hands to the sides

of my mouth, and, in a voice of such energy that it came near to cracking every vein in my head, I yelled: 'Barque ahoy! For God's sake, send a boat and take us off.'

As the words left my throat, the vessel's helm was put down; the clew of the mainsail mounted, and her topsail yard slowly revolved, bringing every cloth upon the main aback, and in a few minutes the graceful little craft was lying without way within speaking distance of us.

In the violence of my transport, I grasped Miss Temple's hand and again and again pressed my lips to it, congratulating her and myself so, for I had no words. The figures of the people were clearly visible: a row of heads forward, the fellow at the wheel on a short raised deck, and two men dressed in white clothes with large straw hats at the mizzen rigging. One of them leisurely clambered on to the rail, and, holding by one hand to a backstay, sang out:

'Wreck ahoy! How many are there of you?'

'Two of us only,' I shouted back; 'this lady and myself.'

'Any contagious sickness?'

'No, no,' I bawled, amazed by the question. 'Pray, send a boat.'

He continued to stand, as though viewing us meditatively; then, 'Wreck ahoy!'

'Hallo!' I cried, scarcely able to send my voice owing to the consternation excited in me by the man's behaviour.

'Are you a sailor?' he roared.

'Oh, say yes, say yes!' cried Miss Temple; 'he may be in want of men.'

'Ay, ay,' I cried; 'I'm a sailor.'

'What sort of sailor?'

'I belonged to an Indiaman.'

'Afore the mast?'

'No, no! send a boat—I'll tell you all about it.'

He descended from the rail and apparently addressed the man that stood near, who walked to the companion-hatch and returned with a telescope; the other took it from him, then knelt down to rest the glass on the rail, and surveyed us through the lenses for at least a couple of minutes, after which he rose, returned the glass to his companion, and flourished his hand at us. I watched, utterly unable to guess what was next to happen. My fears foreboded the departure of the

barque, and the impatience in me worked like madness in my blood. But mercifully we were not to be kept long in this intolerable state of suspense. A few minutes after the man, whom I supposed to be the captain, had motioned to us with his arm, a number of sailors came to the davits at the foremost extremity of the raised afterdeck, where swung a small white boat of a whaling pattern. Four of them entered her, and she sank slowly to the water's edge, where she was promptly freed from her tackles, and three oars thrown over. The fellow in the stern sheets was the man who had handed the glass to the other. The oarsmen pulled swiftly, and in a very short time the little craft was alongside.

'Only two of ye, is it?' said the fellow who grasped the tiller, a short, square, sun-blackened, coarse-looking sailor.

'Only two,' I cried.

'Any luggage?'

'No,' I answered.

'Nothen portable aboard worth carrying off, is there?'

'Yes,' I answered, cursing him in my heart for the delay these questions involved; 'there

are several hams, bottles of fine wine, cheeses, and the like below.'

'Odds niggers! we'll have 'em then,' he exclaimed; and in an instant he was in the wreck's chains, wriggling over the side and calling to one of his fellows to follow him. They hung in the wind a moment, staring their hardest at Miss Temple and myself; then said the short square man in white: 'Where be the goods, master?'

I pointed to the hatch in the deck-house, and directed them to what I called the pantry. But nothing could have induced me to leave the deck. As they disappeared I stepped to the side where the bulwarks were gone.

'Bring the boat close under, my lads,' I exclaimed to the two fellows in her, 'and stand by to receive the lady.'

The hull was rolling gently, with just enough of depression to render a jump into the little fabric as it rose very easy and safe. 'Now, Miss Temple,' I cried. She sprang without an instant's hesitation, was caught by one of the sailors, and in a jiffy the pair of us were snug in the stern sheets side by side.

The two men could not take their eyes off us. They surveyed us with countenances of

profound astonishment, running their gaze over Miss Temple as though she were some creature of another world: as well they might, indeed, seeing the contrast between the groaning, mutilated, smoking hull and this girl leaping from her deck in the choice and elegant attire of the highest fashion, as the two poor devils would imagine—for what eye would *they* have for the disorder of her apparel?—and her hands, breast, and ears sparkling with jewels of value and splendour.

'Are ye English, sir?' said one of them, a middle-aged man, of an honest cast of countenance, with minute eyes deep sunk in his head, and a pair of greyish whiskers uniting at his throat.

'Why, yes, to be sure,' I answered.

'The lady too, sir?'

'Yes, man, yes. What ship are you?'

'The *Lady Blanche*,' he answered.

'Where bound?'

'To Mauritius, from the river Thames.'

I glanced at Miss Temple; but either she had not heeded the fellow's answer or her mind failed to collect its meaning.

'Been long aboard here, sir?' said the

man, indicating the hull by a sideways motion of his head.

'Two nights,' I answered. 'There should be a corvette and an Indiaman close at hand hereabouts. Have you met with either ship?'

'No, sir.'

'Sighted no sail at all?'

'Nothen like un,' exclaimed the other sailor. 'Th' ocean's gone and growed into a Hafrican desert.'

The square man in white, followed by his attendant seaman, arrived at the side, bearing between them a blanket loaded with the produce of the pantry, to judge by the clinking of bottle glass and the orbicular bulgings of cheeses and rounds of hams.

'Catch this here bundle now,' sung out the square man, who, later on, I ascertained was the barque's carpenter, acting also as the second mate. 'Handsomely over the bricks. It's wine, bullies.'

The blanket and its contents were received, and deposited in the bottom of the boat. The men entered her, and we shoved off.

'Did you make up that there fire, sir?' inquired the square man, bringing his eyes in

a stare of astonishment from Miss Temple to myself.

'Yes; nobody else. This lady and I are alone.'

'Then you've set the bloomin' hull on fire,' said he.

I started, and sent a look at the column of smoke, at which I had never once glanced whilst lying alongside, so distracted was my attention by the multiplicity of emotions which surged in me. There was no need to gaze long to gather that more was going to the making of the coils of smoke which were now rising in soot than the nearly consumed remains of the mats and rugs which I had stacked and fed.

'The fire's burnt clean through the deck,' said the square man, 'and there are some casks in flames just forrads of the main hatch. What might they have contained, d'ye know?'

'I don't know,' I answered, trembling like a half-frozen kitten as I watched the smoke, and thought of what must have come to us if yonder barque's approach had been delayed!

'I suppose there'll be gunpowder aboard?'

continued the square man. 'Pull, lads! If a bust-up happens, it'll find us too near at this.'

The men bent their backs, and the sharp-ended little boat went smoking through the quiet rippling waters. Nothing more was said. The square man, whose rugged, weather-blackened face preserved an inimitable air of amazement, eyed us askant, particularly running his gaze over Miss Temple's attire, and letting it rest upon her rings. The toil of the seamen kept them silent. For my part, I was too overcome to utter a word. The passion of delight excited by our deliverance—that is to say, as signified by our rescue by the barque—was paralysed by the horror with which I viewed the growing denseness of the smoke rising from the hull. She was on fire! Great heaven, what would have been our fate—without a boat, without the materials for the construction of a raft—with no more than a few staves of casks to hold by! Such a sea-brigand as the wreck had been in her day was sure to have a liberal store of gunpowder stowed somewhere below: in all probability, in a magazine in the hold under her cabin. What, then, would there have been for us to do? We

must either have sought death by leaping overboard, or awaited the horrible annihilation of an explosion!

Miss Temple's eyes were large and her lips pale and her face bloodless, as though she were in a swoon. She was seeing how it was, and how it must have been with us, and she seemed smitten to the motionlessness of a statue by the perception as she sat by my side staring at the receding hull.

We swept to the little gangway ladder that had been dropped over the rail, and with some difficulty I assisted the girl over the side, swinging by the man-rope with one hand and supporting her waist with the other. The man who had hailed us stood at the gangway. I instantly went up to him with my hand outstretched.

'Sir,' said I, 'you are the captain, no doubt. I thank you for this deliverance, for this preservation of our lives, for this rescue from what *now* must have proved a horrible doom of fire.'

He took my hand and held it without answering, whilst he continued to stare at me with an intentness that in a very few moments astonished and embarrassed me.

'What is your name, sir?' he presently said.

'Laurence Dugdale,' I answered.

'Mate of an Indiaman, I think you said, sir?'

'No,' I replied. 'I was for two years at sea in an Indiaman as midshipman.'

He let fall my hand, and his face changed whilst he recoiled a step, meanwhile running his eyes from top to toe of me.

'A midshipman?' he exclaimed, with an accent of contempt. 'Why, a midshipman ain't a *sailor!* How long ago is it since you was a midshipman?'

'Six years,' I answered, completely bewildered by questioning of this sort at such a moment.

'Six years!' he cried, whilst his face grew longer still. 'Why, then, I don't suppose you'll even *know* what a quadrant means?'

'Certainly I know all about it,' I answered, with a half-glance at Miss Temple, who stood beside me listening to these questions in a torment of surprise and suspense.

'Are ye acquainted with navigation, then?' inquired the captain.

'Sufficiently well, I believe, to enable me

to carry a ship to any part of the world,' I rejoined, controlling my rising temper, though I was sensible that there was blood in my cheeks and that my eyes were expressing my mood.

'Why, then, that's all right!' he cried, brightening up. 'You tell me you could find your way about with a sextant?'

'Yes, sir, I have told you so.'

'By heaven! then,' he roared, 'I'm glad to see ye! Welcome aboard the *Lady Blanche*, sir. And you, mem, I am sure.' Here he pulled off his immense straw hat and gave Miss Temple an unspeakably grotesque bow. 'What have you got there?' he bawled to the square man.

'A blanket full of wines and cheeses and 'ams,' answered the man, who was helping to manœuvre the bundle inboards over the side.

'All right, all right!' shouted the captain. 'Now put 'em down, do, and get your boat hooked on and hoisted, d'ye hear? and get your topsail yard swung. Why, who's been and set that wreck on fire?'

'The flare's burnt through her deck,' cried the square man in a surly tone, 'and I allow she'll be ablowing up in a few minutes.'

But she was too far distant to suffer this conjecture to alarm the captain.

'Let her blow up,' said he; 'there's room enough for her,' and then giving Miss Temple another convulsive bow, he invited us to step into the cabin.

This was a little state-room under the short after-deck, and, with its bulkheaded berths abaft, a miniature likeness in its way of the *Countess Ida's* saloon. It was a cosy little place, with a square table amidships, a bench on either hand of it screwed to the deck, a flat skylight overhead, a couple of old-fashioned lamps, a small stove near to the trunk of the mizzen-mast, a rack full of tumblers, and so forth.

'Sit ye down, mem,' said the captain, pointing to a bench. 'Sir, be seated. I heard Mr. Lush just now talk of wines, and cheeses, and hams; but what d'ye say to a cut of boiled beef and a bottle of London stout? Drifting about in a wreck ain't wholesome for the soul, I believe; but I never heard that it affected the appetite.'

'You are very good,' I exclaimed; 'our food for the last three days has been no more than ship's bread and marmalade—poor fare

for the lady, fresh from the comforts and luxuries of an Indiaman's cuddy.'

He went to the cabin door and bawled; and a young fellow, whom I afterwards found out was his servant, came running aft. He gave him certain directions, then returned to the table, where he sat for a long two minutes first staring at me and then at Miss Temple without a wink of his eyes. I observed that my companion shrunk from this extraordinary silent scrutiny. I had never witnessed in any other human head such eyes as that fellow had. They were a deformity by their size, being about twice too big for the width and length of his face, of a deep ink-black, resembling discs of ebony gummed upon china. There was no glow, no mind in them, that I could distinguish, scarcely anything of vitality outside their preternatural capacity of staring, that was yet immeasurably heightened by the steadiness of the lids, which I never once beheld blinking. His face was long and yellow, closely shorn, and of an indigo blue down the cheeks, upon the chin, and upon the upper lip. He had a very long aquiline nose with large nostrils, which constantly dilated, as though he snuffed up rather than breathed

the air. His eyebrows were extraordinarily thick, and met in a peculiar tuft in the indent of the skull above the nose; whilst his hair, black as his eyes, and smooth and gleaming as the back of a raven, lay combed over his ears down upon his back. He was dressed in a suit of white drill, the flowing extremities of his trousers rounding to his feet in the shape of the mouth of a bell, from which protruded a pair of long square-toed shoes of yellow leather. I should instantly have put him down as a Yankee but for his accent, that was cockney beyond the endurance of a polite ear.

I broke into his intolerable scrutiny by asking him from what port his ship hailed; but he continued to stare at me in silence for some considerable time after I had made this inquiry. He then started, flourished a great red cotton pocket-handkerchief to his brow, and exclaimed: 'Sir, you spoke?'

I repeated the question.

'The *Lady Blanche* is owned at Hull,' said he; 'but we're from the Thames for Mauritius. And what's your story? How came you and this beautiful lady aboard that hull? You're gentlefolks, I allow. I see breeding

in your hands, mem,' fixing his unwinking eyes upon her rings. 'You talk of an Indeeman. Let's have it all afore the boiled beef comes along.'

So saying, he hooked his thumbs in his waistcoat, brought his back against the table, and forking his long shanks out, sat in a posture of attention, keeping his amazing eyes bent on my face whilst I spoke. It did not take me very long to give him the tale. He listened without so much as a syllable escaping from him, and when I had made an end, he continued to gaze at me in silence.

'By what name shall I address you?' said Miss Temple.

He started, as before, and answered: 'John Braine; Captain John Braine, mem; or call it Captain Braine: John's only in the road. That's my name, mem.'

She forced a smile, and said: 'Captain Braine, the *Countess Ida* cannot be far distant, and I have most earnestly to entreat you to seek her. I am sure she is to be found after a very short hunt. I have a dear relative on board of her, who will fret her heart away if she believes I am lost. All my luggage, too, is in that ship. My mother, Lady

Temple, will most cheerfully pay any sum that may be asked for such trouble and loss of time as your search for the Indiaman might occasion.'

I thought he meant to stare at her without answering; but after a short pause he exclaimed: 'The Indeeman's bound to Bombay, ain't she? Well, we're a-navigating the same road she's taking. It is three days since you lost her; where'll she be now, then? That can only be known to the angels, which look down from a taller height than there's e'er a truck afloat that'll come nigh. Now, mem, I might shift my hellum and dodge about for a whole fortnight and do no good. It would be the same as making up our minds to lose her. But by keeping all on as we are, there'll ne'er be an hour that won't hold inside of it a chance of our rising her on one bow or t'other. See what I mean, mem? You're aboard of a barque with legs, as Jack says. Your Indeeman's had a three days' start; and if so be as she *is* to be picked up, I'll engage to have ye aboard of her within a week. But to dodge about in search of her —the Lord love 'ee, mem! The sea's too big for any sort of chiveying.'

'I am completely of Captain Braine's opinion,' said I, addressing Miss Temple, whose face was full of distress and dismay. 'It would be unreasonable to expect this gentleman to delay his voyage by a search that, in all human probability, must prove unprofitable. A hunt would involve the loss of our one chance of falling in with her this side the Cape.'

She clasped her hands and hung her head, but made no reply. The captain's servant entered at that moment with a tray of food, which he placed upon the table; and the skipper bidding us fall to and make ourselves at home in a voice as suggestive of the croak of a raven as was his hair of the plumage of that bird, stalked on to the deck, where the sailors—who by this time had hoisted the boat and trimmed the barque's yards—were coiling down the gear and returning to the various jobs they had been upon before they had hove the ship to.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAPTAIN BRAINE

After three days of sailors' biscuit and strong cheese and marmalade of the flavour of foot sugar, the lump of cold salt beef that the captain's man set before me ate to my palate with a relish that I had never before found in the choicest and most exquisitely cooked meat; and a real treat, too, to my shipwrecked sensibilities, was the inspiration of home and civilisation in the tumbler of foaming London stout. Miss Temple seemed too harassed, too broken down in mind, to partake of food; but by dint of coaxing and entreating I got her to taste a mouthful, and then put her lips to a glass of stout; and presently she appeared to find her appetite by eating, as the French say, and ended with such a repast as I could have wished to see her make.

When the man put the tray down, he went

out, and the girl and I were alone during the meal. Now that I had recovered from the first heart-subduing shock of the discovery that the hull was on fire, and could realise that, even supposing she had not been set on fire, we had still been delivered from what in all probability must have proved a long, lingering, soul-killing time of expectation, dying out into hopelessness and into a period of famine, thirst, and death: I say now that I could realise our rescue from these horrors, my spirits mounted, my joy was an intoxication, I could have cried and laughed at the same time, like one in hysteria. I longed to jump from my chair and dance about the cabin that I might vent the oppression of my transports by movement. I was but a young man, and life was dear to me, and we had been in dire peril, and were safe What a paradise was this cosy little cabin after that ghost-haunted, narrow crib of a deck-house! How soothing beyond all words to the nerves was the light floating rolling of the graceful little snow-white barque, under control of her helm, and vitalised in every plank by the impulse of her airy soaring canvas, compared with the jerky, feverish, staggering, tumblefi-

cation of the wreck, with its deadly deck leaning at desperate angles to the fang-like remnants of the crushed bulwarks, and its uncovered hatches yawning to the heavens, as though in a dumb mouthing of entreaty for extinction!

'Oh! Miss Temple,' I cried, 'I cannot bring my mind to believe in our good fortune! This time yesterday! how hopeless we were! And now we are safe! I thank God, I most humbly thank God, for His mercy! Your lot would soon have become a frightful one aboard that wreck.'

'Yet what would I give,' she exclaimed, 'if this ship were the *Countess Ida!* What is to become of us? For how long are we to wander about in a state of destitution, Mr. Dugdale—mere beggars, without apparel, without conveniences, dependent for our very meals upon the bounty of strangers?' and she brought her eyes, with the old flash in them, from the table to my face, at which she gazed with an expression of temper and mortification.

'You would not be a woman,' said I, 'if you did not think of your dress. But, pray, consider this: that your baggage is now

recoverable; whereas, but for this *Lady Blanche*——'

'Oh! but it would have been so happy a thing, that might so easily have happened too, had this vessel been the Indiaman.'

'Cannot you summon a little patience to your aid?' said I. 'Our strange-eyed captain spoke with judgment when he suggested the probability of your exchanging his ship for the *Countess Ida* within a week.'

'Well, I will be patient, if I can,' said she, looking down with an air of trouble and distress in the pout of her lip; 'but is it not about time that the adventure ended?'

'Suppose it may be only now beginning?'

She gave me a side-glance and exclaimed somewhat haughtily: 'I really believe, Mr. Dugdale, you enjoy this sort of experiences; and if I were a man—— But it *must* end!' she added with an air as though she was about to weep. 'It is unendurable to think of being carried about the world in this fashion. I shall insist—well, I shall bribe Captain Braine to question every ship he passes as to her destination, and the first vessel we encounter that is going home I shall go on board of.'

'Alone?' said I.

'No,' she answered, half closing her eyes and looking a little away from me; 'you would not suffer me to travel alone? Besides, do not you want to get home too?'

'I would rather find my way to Bombay,' said I. 'My baggage as well as yours is aboard the *Countess Ida*, and I should like to get it, though not at the cost of too much trouble. I am bound to India on a visit, and am not expected home for a good many months. Now, I don't see why both of us shouldn't keep our appointments by sticking in this barque, and sailing in her to the Mauritius, whence we ought to be able, without difficulty, to ship ourselves for Bombay. The *Lady Blanche* has the hull of a clipper, and it will be strange if the pair of us are not ashore at Bombay some weeks before the *Countess Ida* sails.'

She listened with impatience, and when I had ended, said: 'If the chance offers, I shall certainly go home. I shall take the first ship that passes, though it should cost a thousand pounds to bribe Captain Braine and the commander of the vessel that re-

ceives me. How is it possible for me to continue thus?' and here she looked at her dress. 'And where is Mauritius? Is it not nearly as far off as Bombay? Whereas England is not so very remote from this part of the ocean.'

'Well, Miss Temple, I am your humble servant,' said I. 'Head as you will, I shall most dutifully follow you.'

'I beg that you will not be satirical.'

'God forbid!' said I, averting my eyes; for I was sensible that they were expressing more than I had any desire she should observe. 'I wish to see you safe, and meanwhile happy. If we pick up a ship homeward bound, we can commission Captain Braine to request Keeling, if he encounters him, to transfer our baggage to the first craft he speaks going to England. Your aunt's maid will know all about your luggage.'

She watched me, as though doubtful whether I was joking or not; but I was cut short by the entrance of Captain Braine.

'I hope you have done pretty well?' he exclaimed, after gazing at us for a short time without speaking; it is poor fare, mem, for the likes of you. But the ship'll afford

nothing fresh till we kill a pig. What did you say your name was, sir?'

'Dugdale,' said I.

'Ha!' he cried, whilst he viewed me steadfastly, 'to be sure. Dugdale. That was it. Well, Mr. Dugdale, there might be an edifying sight for you and the lady to behold from the deck.'

'What?' swiftly exclaimed Miss Temple with a start.

'The hull, mem, we took you from,' he replied in his hollow somewhat deep voice, 'is rapidly growing into a big blaze.'

Her face changed to a mood of disappointment. I believe she thought that the captain had come to announce the Indiaman in sight: I was about to speak:

'Captain Braine,' she said, approaching him by a dramatic stride, and exclaiming proudly, as though she would subdue him by her mere manner to acquiescence in her wishes, 'I am without wearing apparel, saving the attire in which you now view me, and it is absolutely necessary I should return home as speedily as possible. My mother will fear that I have perished, and I must be the bearer of my own news, or the report of my being

lost may cause her death, so exceedingly delicate is her health. She is rich, and will reward you in any sum you may think proper to demand for enabling me to return to England quickly.'

An indescribable smile as she said these words crept over the man's face and vanished. I was strongly impressed by the expression of it, and observed him closely.

'Therefore, Captain Braine,' she proceeded, 'I have to entreat you to promise me that you will signal to the ships you may pass, and put me on board the first one, no matter what sort of vessel she be, that is sailing directly to England.'

He silently surveyed her, and then directed his eyes at me.

'You'll be wanting to get home too, sir, I suppose?' said he.

'Oh yes,' I replied. 'Miss Temple is under my care, and I must see her safe.'

He turned to her again, and stood staring; then said: 'That'll be all right, mem; we're bound to be falling in with something coming along presently; and if England's her destination and she'll receive ye, the boat that brought you from the hull shall take you

to her, weather permitting. That'll do, I think?'

She bowed, looking as pleased as agitation and anxiety would allow her.

'Come now and take a look at the hull,' continued Captain Braine; 'and then'——

'You quite understand, I hope,' she interrupted, 'that any sum'——

He broke in with an odd flourish of his hand. 'No need to mention that matter, mem,' he exclaimed; 'we are Christian men in that part of the country where I come from, and there's never no talk of pay amongst us for doing what the Lord directs—succouring distressed fellow-creatures.'

With which he spun upon his heels and walked out of the cabin, leaving us to follow him.

I had no eyes nor thoughts for anything else than the hull the moment I saw her. I remember recoiling as to a blow, and panting for a few breaths with my hand to my side. She had slipped to something more than two miles away down on the starboard quarter, and although only a portion of her was as yet on fire, she was showing as a body of flame brilliant and forked, soaring and

drooping against the leaden-hued background of sky. Shudder after shudder went like ice through me as my sight swept the mighty girdle of the deep, coming back to the little body of flame that most horribly to every trembling instinct in me accentuated the lonely immensity of the surface on which it glowed.

'Think—if we were on her now!' I muttered to Miss Temple. She hid her face.

'Was there any valleyables aboard her, Mr. Dugdale, d'ye know?' said the captain.

'I cannot tell you,' I answered in a voice subdued by emotion; 'I did not search the sleeping-berths. There was little enough in her hold.'

'Ye should have crept away down in the run,' said he; 'that's where the chaps which peopled her would stow their booty if they had any. If I'd known she'd been a privateersman—— How came ye to set her on fire?'

'My signal burnt through her deck, so I was informed by that gentleman there,' I replied, indicating the square man, who stood a little way from us.

'Was that so, Mr. Lush?' cried the captain.

'Was what so?' asked Mr. Lush. The captain explained. 'Well, I dunno,' answered the other; 'there was fire in the hold when I looked down, and it seemed to me as if flakes of it was falling through the deck. But what does it signify? Wood ain't cast-iron, and if ye makes a flare upon a timber deck, why, then what I says is, stand by!'

'Oh look, Mr. Dugdale!' shrieked Miss Temple at that moment, tossing her arms in horror, and standing with her hands upraised, as though in a posture of calling down a curse upon the distant thing.

My eye was on the wreck, as hers had been, and I saw it all. There was a huge crimson flash, as though some volcanic head had belched in fire; daylight as it was, the stretch of clouds above and beyond the wreck glared out in a dull rusty red to the amazing stream of flame; a volume of smoke white as steam, shaped like a balloon, and floating solid to the sight, slowly rose like some phenomenal emanation from the secret depths of the ocean. There followed the sullen, deep-throated blast of the explosion. Captain

Braine snatched a telescope from the skylight and levelled it, and after peering a little, thrust the glass into my hand.

'See if you can find out where she's gone to,' said he with a singular grin, in which his eyes did not participate.

I looked: the water delicately brushed by the light wind flowed in nakedness under the shadow of the slowly soaring and enlarging cloud of white smoke. Not the minutest point of black, not the merest atom of fragment of wreck, was visible. I put down the glass with a quivering hand, and going to the rail, looked into the sea to conceal my moist eyes, too overcome to speak.

'A good job you weren't in that hull, mem,' said the captain to Miss Temple; 'it would be sky high with any one that had been there by this time: a devil of a mount, as Jack says. But you're aboard a tidy little ship now. If so be that you are at all of a nautical judge, mem, cast your eyes aloft and tell me if there's e'er an Indeeman or a man-of-war, too, if ye will, with spars stayed as my masts is, with such a fit of canvas, with such a knowing cocked-ear like look as the run of them yardarms has, with such mastheads

tapering away like the holy spire of a meeting-house, and that beautiful little skysail atop to sarve as a cloud for any tired angel that may be flying along to rest upon! Ha!'

He drew so deep a breath as he concluded that I turned to look at him. He stood gazing up at the canvas on the main as though in an ecstasy; his hands were crossed upon his breast after the manner of coy virgins in paintings; his right knee was crooked and projected; I could not have imagined so curious a figure off the stage. Indeed, I supposed he was acting now to divert Miss Temple. I glanced at the tough, sullen, storm darkened face of old Lush, to gather his opinion on the behaviour of this captain; but his expression was of wood, and there was no other meaning in it that I could distinguish save what was put there by the action of his jaws as he gnawed upon a junk of tobacco, carrying his sight from seawards to aloft and back again as regularly as the swing of the spars.

Miss Temple drew to my side with a manner of uneasiness about her. She whispered, while she seemed to be speaking of the wreck, motioning with her hand in the direction of

the smoke that was slowly drawing on to our beam in a great staring, still-compacted mass, white as fog against the leaden heaven: 'I believe he is not in his right mind.'

'No matter,' I swiftly replied; 'his ship is sound. Captain,' I exclaimed, 'I hope you will have a spare cabin for this lady. For my part, you may sling me a hammock anywhere, or a rug and a plank will make me all the bed I want.'

'Oh, there's accommodation for ye both below,' he answered; 'there's the mate's berth unoccupied. The lady can have that. And next door to it there's a cabin with a bunk in it. I'll have it cleared out for you. Come down and see for yourselves.'

He led the way into the little cuddy, as I may term it, and conducted us to a hatch close against the two sleeping berths right aft. He descended a short flight of steps, and we found ourselves in 'tweendecks in which I should not have been able to stand erect with a tall hat on. It was gloomy down here. I could distinguish with difficulty a number of cases of light goods stowed from the deck to the beams, and completely blocking up all the forward portion of this part of the vessel.

There were two cabins in the extremity corresponding with the cabins above, with such another small hatch as we had descended through lying close against them, but covered: the entrance as I took it to 'the run' or 'lazarette.' Captain Braine opened the cabin door on the port side, and we peered into a small but clean and airy berth lighted by a large scuttle. I noticed a couple of sea-chests, a suit of oil-skins hanging under a little shelf full of books, a locker, a mattress, and a bundle of blankets in the bunk, a large chart of the English Channel nailed against the side, and other matters of a like sort.

'You'll be able to make yourself pretty comfortable here, mem,' said Captain Braine.

'Are there any rats?' asked Miss Temple, rolling her eyes nervously over the deck.

'Bless you, no!' answered the captain. 'At the very worst, a cockroach here and there, mem.'

'But this cabin is occupied,' said I.

'It was, young gentleman, it was,' he exclaimed, in a hollow raven voice, that wonderfully corresponded with his countenance, and particularly somehow or other with his hair—'it was my chief-mate's cabin. But he's dead,

sir.' He gazed at me steadfastly, and added, 'Dead and gone, sir.'

Miss Temple slightly started, and with a hurried glance at the bunk, asked how long the man had been dead.

'Three weeks,' responded Captain Braine, preserving his sepulchral tone, as though he supposed it was the correct voice in which to deliver melancholy information.

'May I see the next cabin?' said Miss Temple.

'Certainly,' he answered; and going out, he opened the door.

This room was the same size as the berth which adjoined it; but it was crowded with a collection of sailmakers' and boatswains' stores, bolts of canvas, new buckets, scrubbing-brushes, and so on. There was a bunk under the scuttle full of odds and ends.

'I would rather occupy this berth than the other,' said Miss Temple.

'You're not afraid of ghosts, mem?' exclaimed the captain, fixing his immense dead black eyes upon her.

'I presume this room can be cleared out, and I prefer it to the other,' she answered haughtily.

I broke in, somewhat alarmed by these airs: 'Oh, by all means, Miss Temple. Choose the cabin you best like. Captain Braine is all kindness in furnishing us with such excellent accommodation. This stuff can be put into my berth, if you please, captain. I shall merely need room enough to get into my bunk.'

'I'll make that all right,' he answered somewhat sulkily. 'How about bedding? The lady's a trifle particular, I fear. She wouldn't be satisfied to roll herself up in a dead man's blanket, I guess.'

'Leave me to manage,' said I, forcing a note of cheerfulness into my voice, though I was greatly vexed by Miss Temple's want of tact. 'There's more bedding than either of us will require in less than a bolt of your canvas. We are fresh from an experience that would make a paradise of your forepeak, captain. And so,' said I, plunging from the subject, in the hope of carrying off the ill-humour that showed in his face, 'you are without a chief-mate?'

'I'll tell you about that by-and-by,' said he. 'This here crib, then, is to be the lady's? Now, what have I got that you'll be wanting,

mem? There's a bit of a looking-glass next door. He used to shave himself in it. You won't mind that, perhaps? His image ain't impressed on the plate. It'll show ye true as you are, for all that he shaved himself in it.'

Miss Temple smiled, and said that she would be glad to have the glass.

'There'll be his hairbrush,' continued Captain Braine, 'though *that* might prove objectionable,' he added doubtfully, talking with his eyes fixed unwinkingly upon her. 'And yet I don't know; if it was put to soak in a bucket of salt-water, it ought to come out sweet enough. There's likewise a comb,' he proceeded, taking his chin betwixt his thumb and forefinger and stroking it; 'there's nothing to hurt in a comb, and it's at your sarvice, mem. If poor old Chicken were here, he'd be very willing, I'm sure; but he's gone—gone dead.'

He looked at Miss Temple again. I watched him with attention. He seemed to sink into a fit of musing; then, waking up out of it in a sudden way, he cried: 'You've got no luggage at all, have ye, mem?'

'No,' responded Miss Temple with gravity.

'I'm sorry,' said he, 'that I didn't bring

Mrs. Braine along with me this voyage. She wanted to come, poor thing, observing me to be but very ordinary during most of the time I was ashore—very ordinary indeed,' he repeated, shaking his head. 'If she was here we could manage.'

'Pray, give yourself no concern on that head, captain,' said I; 'we shall be falling in with the Indiaman presently; and supposing the worst to come to the worst—what time do you give yourself for the run from here to the Mauritius?'

'I'm not agoing to say—I'm not agoing to say!' he cried with an accent of excitement that astonished me; 'what's the good of talking when you don't know? Wouldn't it be a sin to go and make promises to people in your condition and disappoint 'em? I can just tell ye this: that Baltimore itself never turned out a keel able to clip through it as this here *Lady Blanche* can when the chance is given her. And now,' he exclaimed, changing his voice, 'suppose we clear out of this, and go up into the daylight and fresh air;' and without pausing for an answer he trudged off.

I handed Miss Temple up the ladder, and

we gained the little cabin, or living-room as it might be termed. The young fellow who acted as steward or servant was busy at the glass-rack. The captain called to him, and peremptorily and most intelligently gave him certain instructions with respect to the clearing out and preparing of the berths below for our reception. He told him where he would find a spare mattress—'Quite new, never yet slept on,' he said, contorting his figure into a bow to Miss Temple—he had a couple of shawls and a homely old rug which had made several voyages, and these were to be put into her bunk; the man was to see that the lady lacked no convenience which the barque could afford. 'The late Mr. Chicken's mattress was to be given to me along with his bedding, if so be that I was willing to use the same.' Other instructions, all expressive of foresight and hospitable consideration, he gave to the fellow, who then went forward to obtain help to clear out the cabins.

'We are deeply indebted to you, captain,' said I, 'for this very generous behaviour'——

'Not a word, sir, if you please,' he interrupted. 'I have a soul as well as another, and I know my duty. Lady, a hint: you have

some fine jewelry upon you ; take my advice and put it in your pocket.'

She was alarmed by this, and looked at me.

I smiled, and said 'The captain of a ship is Lord Paramount ; his orders must be obeyed, Miss Temple.'

Without another word she began to pull off her rings, the skipper steadfastly watching her.

'Will you take charge of them for me, Mr. Dugdale?' said she.

I placed them in my pocket. She then took off a very beautiful diamond locket from her throat, and this I also carefully stowed away.

'I will remove my earrings presently,' she exclaimed with a slight flush in her cheek and a sparkle as of ire in her gaze, though her lips still indicated an emotion of dismay.

'My advice to you is—at once, mem,' said the captain.

'We must believe that Captain Braine is fully sensible of the meaning of his requests,' said I,' answering the glance she shot at me.

She removed the earrings and gave them to me. The captain stood running his eyes

over her figure; then, with a melodramatic gesture, pointed to her watch. This, too, with the handsome chain belonging to it, I pocketed. He now addressed himself to contemplating me.

'You don't need to show any watch-chain,' said he, speaking with his head drooping towards his left shoulder; 'there's no good in that signet ring either. As to the breast-pin'—he half-closed one eye—'well, perhaps that's a thing that won't hurt where it is.'

He waited until I had taken off my ring and dropped my chain into my waistcoat pocket, and then, looking first of all aft and then forward, then up at the little skylight, whilst he seemed to hold his breath as though intently listening, he approached us, as we stood together, by a stride, and said in a low deep voice, tremulous with intensity of utterance: 'My men are not to be trusted. Hush! If they imagined I suspected them, they would cut my throat and heave me overboard.'

Miss Temple took my arm.

'Let me understand you?' said I, wrestling with my amazement. 'In what sense are they untrustworthy?'

He stared eagerly and nervously about him

again, and then, extending the fingers of his left hand, he touched one of them after another, as though counting, whilst he said: 'First, I have reason to believe that Lush, the carpenter, who acts as my second mate, committed a murder four years ago.'

'Good God!' I ejaculated.

'Hold!' he cried. 'Next, there ain't no shadow of a doubt that two at least of my able seamen are escaped convicts. Next, there is a man forward who was concerned in a mutiny that ended in the ringleaders being hung. Next'—he paused, and then exclaimed: 'but no need to go on alarming the lady.'

'But were you not acquainted with these men's characters at the time of their signing articles?' said I.

'No, young man—no,' he answered with a most melancholy shake of the head; 'it's all come out since, and a deal more atop of it. But hush! Discretion is the better part of valour, as Jack says. There's no call to be afraid. They know the man I am, and what's better, they know I know *them*. Ye're quite safe, mem; only, don't be a-tempting sailors of their sort by a sight of the valleyables you've been a-carrying about with you. And now,

perhaps you'll excuse me whilst I goes and looks after the ship.'

He gave us another extraordinary bow—I never met with any posture-maker who approached this man in the capacity of distorting his person—and walked out of the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CREW OF THE BARQUE

Miss Temple released my arm and sank upon a bench.

'Can you doubt now that he is mad?' she exclaimed.

'Somewhat eccentric, certainly, but perhaps not mad, though. He is treating us very kindly. How intelligently he instructed his man in regard to our cabins!'

'He may be kind; but I believe we should have been safer on the hull than here.'

'Oh no, no, no!'

'But I say yes,' she exclaimed in her most imperious air, and gazing at me with hot and glowing eyes. 'It is quite true the wreck was burnt; but if this vessel had not come into sight, you would not have signalled, and then the hull would not have been set on fire. It is maddening to think that perhaps within the next three or four hours the Indiaman or

the corvette may sail over the very spot where the wreck blew up.'

'I heartily hope that one or the other will do so,' said I; 'for if she be so close to us as all that, we're bound to fall in with her.'

She looked at her hands, turning her fingers back and front, as though they were some novel and unexpected sight to her.

'I wonder, Mr. Dugdale,' said she, 'you can doubt that the man is insane. Remember the extraordinary questions he put to you when we first arrived. I believe, had you told him you were ignorant of navigation, he would have sent us back to the wreck. And then how he stares! There is something shocking in the fixed regard of his dreadfully inanimate black eyes. What a very extraordinary face, too! I cannot believe that he is a sailor. He has the appearance of a monk just released from some term of fearful penance and mortification.'

'On the other hand he has received us very kindly. He would not suffer you to speak of paying him. He promptly set us down to such entertainment as his vessel furnishes. He may be mad half-way round

the compass, but all the rest of the points are sound,'

'I am astonished,' she cried with a manner of petulant vivacity, 'to hear you say that we are safer in this ship than had we remained in the hull. There we were alone; but who are the people with whom we must be locked up in this vessel until we sight the Indiaman or some sail that will receive us? A murderer—convicts—mutineers—a crew of men in whose sight a jewel must not be exhibited lest they should be tempted. Tempted to what?' She violently shuddered. 'How can you speak of this ship as safer than the wreck?'

'Because I happen to feel quite certain that she is; but I will not say so, for it vexes you to hear me.'

'Oh this ridiculous, this horribly ridiculous degrading situation fills me with anger. To think of being reduced to a perfect state of squalor—having to conceal one's jewelry for fear of—of—something awful, I am sure; and you dare not, though you *could* name it, Mr. Dugdale.' I smiled, and her warmth increased. 'That I should have been ever tempted,' she proceeded, 'to undertake the odious voyage to Bombay, for *this*! To be without a change

of dress, to be obliged to sleep in a little dark horrid cabin, and meanwhile not to have the least notion when it is all to end!'

Well, thought I, as I looked at her eyes shining with spirit and temper, and marked the faint hectic of her ill-humour in her cheeks, the expression of mingled pride and fretfulness in her lips, the wrathful rising and falling of her breast, here, to be sure, is a new version of the play of Katharine and Petruchio; only, though she be Kate to the life, it is not I, but old daddy Neptune who is to break her spirit, and unshrew her into somebody's very humble servant. But is there any magic, I thought, even in ocean's rough, brutal, unconscionable usage to render docile such a woman as this? Nay, would any man wish it otherwise with her than as it is when he gazes at her eyes and figure, beholds the dignity and haughtiness of her carriage, the assumption of maiden sovereignty visible in every move of her arm, in every curl of her lip, in every motion of her form!

'What are you thinking of?' she asked: 'you are plunged in thought. I hope you are struggling to do justice to my perception of the truth.'

I started, and then laughed out. 'I will not tell you what I was thinking of,' said I; 'but I will express what was in my mind whilst you were speaking just now. You dwell with horror upon the captain's account of his crew. Well, I heartily wish for both our sakes that they were an honest straight-headed body of men. But then every ship's forecastle is a menagerie. There is ruffianism, and there is respectability. Quite likely that the carpenter Lush may have killed a man; but one must hear the story before deciding to call him a murderer. So of the convicts; so of the mutineers. In many ships at sea there is unspeakable provocation, and crimes are committed of which the blood rests upon the head of anyone sooner than those who are held guilty and punished by the law. I am not to be greatly frightened by Captain Braine's talk of his crew, particularly since in a few days we may either be on board the Indiaman or homeward-bound in another ship. Let us now go on deck. I wish to take a view of the sailors, and see what sort of a craft this is, for as yet I have seen but little of her.'

I could not help remarking that she kept

very close to me as we made our way out of the cuddy, and that the glances she directed forwards where some seamen were at work were full of apprehension. The short poop of the *Lady Blanche* was gained by a central ladder falling fair in the face of the little doorway of the cuddy front with its two small windows and row of buckets. A low, handsomely carved wooden rail was fixed athwart the break of this raised deck, and I stood with Miss Temple at a point of it that provided me with a clear view fore and aft. The captain sat on a grating abaft the wheel reading. Mr. Lush was near the mizzen rigging, gazing seawards with a stubborn wooden expression of face. After the spacious decks and wide topgallant-forecastle of the Indiaman, this little *Lady Blanche* looked a mere toy. But though a ship shows least admirably from her own deck, I found a deal to please and even delight me in the first comprehensive look I threw around. She was as clean as a yacht ; the insides of her bulwarks were painted a delicate green, and they were as spotless as though the brush were just off them ; on either side were two little brass guns, mounted on carriages, and they shone

as freshly as though the sunlight were upon them ; the running gear was everywhere neatly coiled away. The small caboose, with its smoking chimney, abaft the foremast ; the length of windlass close in under the overlap of the short space of forecastle ; the white longboat ; the white scuttle-butt abreast of it ; the little winch abaft the mainmast ; the brass-lined circle of the wheel in the grasp of the sober, good-tempered-looking old fellow who had made one of the boat's crew ; the two shapely clinker-built quarter-boats hanging at the davits abreast of the mizzen mast—these and much more seemed details of a miniature delicacy and finish, that entered with surprising effect into the fabric's general character of toy-like grace and elegance. On high, the white canvas soared in symmetrical spaces ; but after the towering spires of the Indiaman, the main-yard of this little barque seemed within reach of the hand, and the tiny skysail that crowned the summit of the airy, snow-white, faintly-swelling cloths, no bigger than a lady's pocket-handkerchief.

'This is really a beautiful little ship, Miss Temple,' said I.

'I might be able to admire her from the

deck of the *Countess Ida*,' she answered; 'but there must be happiness to enable me to find beauty, and I am not happy here.'

I searched the sea-line, but it was as bare and flawless as the rim of a brand-new guinea. The dull shadow of the morning still overspread the heavens; it was the same leaden sky, with here and there a little break of faintness, revealing some edge of apparently motionless cloud, and the ocean lay sallow beneath it, darker than it was for the pencilling of the ripples which wrinkled the wide expanse as they rode the long, light heave of the swell. There were some sailors at work in the waist on jobs, of which I forget the nature; I examined them attentively—they were within easy eyeshot; but though there was no lack of prejudice in my observation, I protest I could find nothing rascally in their appearance. They were all of them of the then familiar type of merchant seaman, as like to members of the crew of the Indiaman as one pea is to another; faces burnt by the sun and decorated with the usual assemblage of warts and moles, all of them of an unmistakably English cut—I am speaking of the five of them then visible—dressed in the rough

apparel of the ocean, rude shirts revealing the bare hairy breast, duck breeches with stains of oil and tar in them which there was no virtue in the scrubbing-brush and the lee-scuppers to remedy. Miss Temple, standing at my side, gazed at them.

'They have quite the look of cut-throats, I think,' said she.

'Well, now, to my fancy,' said I, 'they seem as honest a set of lively hearties as one could wish to sail with.'

'You merely say that to encourage me,' she exclaimed with a pout of vexation. 'Observe that man with the black beard—the one that is nearest to us. Could you figure a completer likeness of a pirate? I do not like his way of glancing at us out of the corner of his eyes. An honest sailor would stare boldly.'

I laughed, and then put on a face of apology.

'You will be smiling at these fears in a few days, I hope,' I exclaimed.

'Yes; but it is the meanwhile we have to think of,' she answered. 'Look at that man there'—meaning Mr. Lush; 'pray, tell me, Mr. Dugdale, that he has a very handsome, manly, good-tempered face.'

'No; I confess I don't like his appearance,' I answered, stealing a peep at the sulky-looking old dog, who continued to stare at the horizon with the immovability of a figure-head; 'yet inside of that hide there may be stowed away a very worthy member of society. A crab-apple is not a fruit to delight the eye; but I believe it is wholesome eating, though a trifle austere.'

At that moment the captain looked up from his book, and after taking a prolonged view of us, came in a slow walk to where we were standing, holding the volume in his hand.

'You have a charming little ship here, captain,' said I; 'I am exceedingly pleased with her.'

'Yes, sir; she's a handy craft. She will do her work,' he answered, sending his unwinking eyes with their sort of slow dead look along the deck.

'Which of those men down there are the convicts and mutineers?' began Miss Temple.

He whipped round upon her with a vehemence of manner that seemed a veritable fury of temper to the first seeing and hearing of it.

'For God Almighty's sake, not a word!

D'ye want to see me a murdered man?' He twisted round on to me: 'Sir, you are to know nothing if you please. This lady is to know nothing. I asked ye both in the cabin to be secret. God's death! if that man yonder had overheard her!' He stopped short, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at Lush.

Miss Temple was deadly pale. She had the same cowed air I had observed in her during our first few hours aboard the wreck.

'I am very sorry—' she muttered.

'For the love of God, mem!' he exclaimed in a whisper, putting his finger to his lips.

It was time to change the subject. I asked him how long he had occupied in his passage from the Thames to this point, spoke of the light trade-wind and baffling airs we had encountered, told him once again of the privateering brig, asked him what he thought would be the chance of the corvette's cutter in such weather as she went adrift in, and in this way coaxed him out of his temper until I had got him to some posture of affability once more. I do not recollect the number of days he named as contained in his passage from London, but I can remember that it was

a very swift run, proving daily totals which must have come very near to steam at times.

'Such a nimble keel as this should make you very easy, Miss Temple,' said I; 'why, here is a craft to sail round and round the *Countess Ida*. Even though we shouldn't pick her up, it is fifty to one that of all her passengers we two shall be the first to arrive in India.'

She fastened her eyes upon the deck with a countenance of incredulity and despair.

'I suppose your port will be St. Louis, sir?' said I.

He stared at me for some moments without speaking, and then slowly inclined his head in a single nod.

'I was never in that island,' I continued; 'but I presume we shall not be at a loss for a vessel to carry us to some part of India whence we may easily make our way to Bombay.'

His lack-lustre gaze seemed to grow deader as, after a pause, he exclaimed: 'There'll be some French skipper to make terms with, I don't doubt, for a passage north.'

'You talk, Mr. Dugdale,' said Miss Temple, 'as though you were well assured that we should not fall in with the Indiaman.'

'I am desirous of creating plenty of chances for ourselves,' said I; then gathering that this might not be a topic profitable to pursue in the presence of so singular a listener as Captain Braine, I again branched off. 'How many,' said I carelessly, 'go to a crew with you, captain?'

He answered leisurely: 'Thirteen as we now are, all told. There was fourteen afore Mr. Chicken died.'

'Well, even at that,' said I, 'a single watch should be able to reef down for you. I suppose'—here I sunk my voice—'that Mr. Lush yonder is now your chief mate?'

'No,' he replied, speaking stealthily; 'I'm my own chief mate. He's the ship's carpenter, and stands watch as second officer. But what are ye to do,' he proceeded, preserving his stealthy delivery, 'with a man whose education don't let him go no further than making a mark for his name?'

'Then, I take it, there is nobody aboard capable of navigating the vessel but yourself?'

'We'll talk about that presently,' said he with a singular look, and pointing with his finger to the deck.

I observed that Miss Temple narrowly watched him.

'Was Mr. Chicken a pretty good navigator?' said I.

He appeared to forget himself in thought, then with a slow emerging air, so to speak, and a steadfast, quite embarrassing stare, he responded: 'Chicken was acquainted with the use of the sextant. He likewise understood the meaning of Greenwich time. He couldn't take a star; but his reckonings was always close when he got them out of the sun. He'd been bred a collierman, and it took him some time to recover the loss of coasts and lee shores and lights. But he was a good sailor, and a religious man; and his death was a blow, sir.'

'Almost a pity that it wasn't Mr. Lush who was beckoned overboard,' said I. (The carpenter had now trudged aft, and was looking into the compass out of hearing.)

'Ah!' exclaimed Captain Braine, heaving a deep sigh and shaking his head: 'Lush's loss would have been my gain. One Chicken

was worth all the Lushes that were ever afloat. —But hush, mem, if *you* please.'

'I shall certainly say nothing more about your crew,' exclaimed Miss Temple quickly and a little haughtily, while she slightly recoiled from the face he turned upon her.

'Have you any books aboard, Captain Braine?' said I, glancing at the volume he held in his hand. 'Any sort of amusement in the shape of chess or cards to help Miss Temple and myself to kill an hour or two from time to time?'

'There are some vollums in Chicken's cabin that belonged to him,' answered Captain Braine. 'I've read two or three of them. His cargo that way was usually edifying. There's Baxter's 'Shove:' a good yarn; there's the 'Pilgrim's Progress;' and there's the 'Whole Dooty o' Man'—a bit leewardly; I couldn't fetch to windward in it myself. For my part, one book's enough for me; and excepting some vollums on navigation, it is the only work I goes to sea with.'

'The Bible!' I exclaimed, taking it from him. I was astonished and pleased. There seemed little for one to apprehend in the character of a man who could dedicate his

leisure to the study of that Book, and I was sensible of an emotion of respect for the strange-looking, staring figure as I returned the little volume to him.

He dropped it into a side-pocket, and then most abruptly walked to the rail, took a long look at the weather and a long look aloft, trudged over to Mr. Lush, with whom he exchanged a sentence or two, and immediately afterwards disappeared down the companion.

For some time after this Miss Temple and I paced the deck together. There was much to talk about, and my companion found a deal to say about Captain Braine, whilst, as we walked, I would catch her taking furtive peeps at Mr. Lush, who, it was easy to see, had inspired her with aversion and fear, though the man had not offered to address a word to us, nor had he once looked our way, thirstily inquisitive as his stare had been whilst in the boat. I could not help contrasting her behaviour now with what I recollected of it aboard the *Countess Ida*. She had put her hand into my arm, and the intimacy of our association in this way might well have suggested an affianced pair. She talked eagerly and with all the passion of the many

emotions which rose in her with her references, to our situation, to her aunt, to the chance of our sighting the Indiaman, and the like; and I don't doubt that the men who watched us from the fore-part of the vessel put us down either as husband and wife or a betrothed couple.

And all this in three days! Three days ago she could hardly bring herself to speak or even to look at me; and now fortune had contrived that she should have no other companion, that she should be locked up with me alone in a dismasted hull, and then be brought, always with me at her side, into a vessel where, as she believed, there was much more to fill us with alarm than in the worst of the conditions which entered into our existence aboard the wreck! Again and again she would ask, with her dark and glowing eyes bent with an expression of despair upon my face, when it was to end and how it was to end; and these questions my heart would echo as I gazed at the cold and alarmed beauty of her face, but with a very different meaning from what she attached to the inquiries.

At last she grew weary of walking, and I took her below and sat with her awhile on a

cushioned locker. It was now drawing on to four o'clock in the afternoon; the breeze quiet, the sky in shadow, the sea very smooth save for the soft undulation of the swell, which pleasantly and soothingly cradled the little fabric as she slipped through it, of a milky white from water-line to truck, to the impulse of her wide overhanging pinions. After a bit, I observed a heaviness in the lids of my companion, and urged her to lie down and take some rest. She consented; and I lingered at her side until sleep overcame her, and then I stood for awhile surveying with deep admiration the calm sweetness of her face, into which had stolen the tenderness of the unconscious woman, softening down the haughty arching of eyebrow, unbending the imperious set of the mouth. It was as though her spirit clad in her own beauty was revealed to me disrobed of all the trappings of the waking humours. I could have knelt by her side, and in that posture have watched her for an hour. Can it be, thought I, as I crept softly to the cuddy door, that I am in love with her?

I leisurely filled my pipe from the hunk of tobacco I had met with in the wreck, taking, whilst I did so, as I stood on the quarter-deck,

a good steady look at such of the sailors as were about, though I contrived an idly curious manner, and directed my eyes as often at the barque's furniture as at the seamen. After I had been on the poop a few minutes, Mr. Lush left it to go forward; and with my pipe betwixt my teeth, I lounged over to the binnacle to see how the ship headed. The man who grasped the spokes was the honest-faced fellow I had before noticed at the wheel; he, I mean, of the minute eyes and whiskers joined at his throat, who had addressed me in the boat whilst we lay alongside the hull. I noticed that he seemed to stir a little uneasily as I approached, as though nervously meditating a speech, and I had scarcely glanced into the compass bowl when he exclaimed: 'I beg your pardon, sir.'

I looked at him.

'The noose,' said he, 'came forrads afore I lay aft for this here trick that the ship you came out of and lost sight of was the *Countess Ida*.'

'That is so,' I exclaimed.

'Might I make so bold,' he continued, slightly moving the wheel, and bringing his specks of eyes into a squint over my head as

he sent a glance at the tiny skysail pulling under the main-truck, 'as to inquire if so be that the bo'sun of that ship was a man named Smallridge?'

'Yes, Smallridge; that was the boatswain's name,' I replied, warming up to the mere reference to that hearty sailor.

'Well,' said he, 'I heerd that he was agoing bo'sun in that ship, and I was pretty nigh signing for her myself, only that her date of sailing didn't give me quite long enough ashore. And how *is* Mr. Smallridge, sir?'

'Very well indeed,' said I.

'I've got a perticler respect for Mr. Smallridge,' he continued; 'he kep' company with my sister for some time, and would ha' married her, but she tailed on to a sojer whilst he was away, prefarring the lobster to the shellback, sir. Well, I'm glad to larn that he's hearty, I'm sure. If so be as we should fall in with the *Countess Ida*, and put you aboard without my seeing of Mr. Smallridge, I'd take it werry kind, sir, if you'd give him Joe Wetherly's respects.'

'I certainly will,' said I with alacrity; 'but I fear there is little chance of our meeting with the Indiaman.'

'Well, there's no telling,' he exclaimed; 'but she'll have to be right in this here barque's road, supposing her to be ahead; and if we should pass her in the dark, why, then, good-night! for she's like grease in the water is this here *Lady Blanche*.'

'Smallridge and I were very good friends. He'd been a sailor in the ship I was afterwards midshipman in.'

'Oh, indeed,' cried he. 'And so *you* was at sea, sir?'

I was about to reply, designing to lead him on into answering certain questions I had in my mind concerning the captain and crew of the barque, when Mr. Lush came up the poop ladder; so, knowing the etiquette, I hauled off, but with the full intention of sounding Mr. Joe Weatherly at large when an opportunity should offer.

CHAPTER XXV

I KEEP A LOOKOUT

I SLIPPED half-way down the little companion ladder to take a peep at Miss Temple, and on observing her to be resting quietly, I returned, and after lighting my pipe anew, stepped over to Mr. Lush, who was employed in cutting off a piece of tobacco from a black cake to serve him as a quid.

'It is not often hereabouts,' said I, by way of starting a conversation, 'that one has a sky like that all day long overhanging one's mast-heads.'

'No,' said he; 'but it's better than the roasting sun;' and he opened his large mouth to receive the cube of tobacco into the hollow of his cheek, whilst he eyed the sky askant, as though in recognition of it as a subject of talk.

'Did you fall in with the smother that ended in the lady and I being stranded aboard the wreck?' I inquired.

'No; there's been ne'er a smother with us.'

'The death of Mr. Chicken,' said I, 'must have been a blow, seeing that the barque carried but a couple of mates.'

'How many mates do a ship of this size want?' said he, without looking at me and slowly masticating.

'Well, she has only one now, anyway,' said I.

'No; she ain't got even one,' he exclaimed, with the manner of an ill-tempered man who only listens for the sake of contradiction and argument.

'Are not *you* second mate?' I asked.

'Not I,' he replied with a gruff laugh. 'They calls me second mate, and I keeps watch and watch with the capt'n as if I *was* second mate; but what I'm signed for is carpenter, and carpenter I be, and there's nothen more to be made out of me than that, and I don't care who the bloomin' blazes hears me say it.

He drew to the rail by a step and expectorated violently over it. I was too anxious for information about this little ship and her crew to suffer my curiosity to be

hindered by the man's rough, coarse, ill-natured speech and demeanour.

'I was wondering where you took your meals,' said I. 'I now understand. You live forward?' He gave me a surly nod. 'But not in the forecastle?'

'Where else? Ain't the fok'sle good enough for me?'

'But does not association of that sort weaken your control over the men?'

'*I've* got no control, and don't want none. The men 'll run if I sing out. And what more's to be expected of sailors?'

'It seems queer, though,' said I, 'since you undertake the work of a second mate, that you shouldn't live aft. It must have been lonely eating for the skipper after Mr. Chicken died?'

'I did live aft afore Mr. Chicken died,' he exclaimed, biting his tobacco with temper, whilst his weather-stained face gathered a new shade of duskiness to the mounting of the blood into his head; 'and then when the capt'n and me comes to be alone, he tarns to and finds out that I ain't choice enough to sit down with—says I ain't got the art of perlite eatin', calls me a hog to my face, and tells me that my snout's for the mess kid and not for

knives and forks and crockery. Him!' He turned his face to the rail and spat again, and looked at me with an expression of anger, but checked himself with violence, and pushed his hands into his breeches pockets with an irritable motion of his whole frame.

I considered that enough had been said; and though I had gained but little information, it was at least made clear to me that there was no love lost between Captain Braine and Mr. Lush. But further conversation would have been rendered impossible in any case, for just then a man struck eight bells on the main-deck, and a minute or two later the wheel was relieved, the captain arrived, and the carpenter went forward in a round-backed sulky walk, his legs bowed, his muscular arms hanging up and down without a swing, each bunch of his fingers curled like fish-hooks.

I had talked enough, and was weary of standing and walking; so, when I spied the skipper, I slipped off the poop and seated myself on a bench abreast of my sleeping companion, where I remained for half an hour, often gazing at her, my mind very busy with a hundred thoughts, foremost amongst which was the shuddering recollection of our late

experiences and narrow escape, and deep thankfulness to God for His merciful preservation of us. The entrance of the captain's servant—a young fellow named Wilkins, to be hereafter so called: a memorable figure in this startlingly eventful passage of my life which I am endeavouring to relate: a veal-faced, red-headed, shambling fellow of some two-and-twenty years, with white eyebrows and lashes, and a dim blue eye—the entrance, I say, of this man with a tray of tea-things aroused Miss Temple, who, after a brief bewildered stare at me, smiled, and sat upright.

'There is always something new now,' she exclaimed, 'to look at when I open my eyes after sleeping. Yesterday it was the wreck; to-day it is this ship. What will it be to-morrow? Is there anything in sight, Mr. Dugdale?'

'There was nothing when I left the deck half an hour ago,' said I.

She had awakened with a slight flush of sleep in her face that greatly enriched her eyes; but the delicate glow quickly faded; she was speedily colourless as alabaster. She smoothed her hair and put on her hat, that she had removed when she lay down.

'It is strange,' she exclaimed in a low voice, 'I should not seem able to endure feeling that I am not in a condition to instantly leave this vessel. It was so with me in the wreck. Even without my hat, I feel unready; and then, again, there is the sense of not being exactly as I was when I left the *Countess Ida*.'

The captain called through the skylight: 'Wilkins, bring me some tea and a biscuit up here.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Pray,' said I, 'when and where does the captain dine?'

'I took his dinner to his cabin,' responded the young fellow; 'he mostly eats there. But now you're here, I allow he'll be a-jining of you.'

'This is no meal for you, Miss Temple,' said I, with a glance at the old teapot and the small plate of biscuits which furnished out the repast. 'No milk—brown sugar—no butter, of course!' Wilkins grinned whilst he poured out some tea into a cup. 'You've had nothing to eat since we first came aboard.'

'I want nothing,' she answered.

'Well, then, *I* do,' said I. 'Captain Braine

is quite right. Shipwreck doesn't impair the appetite.'

'There'll be supper at seven, sir,' said Wilkins.

'And what do you call supper?' I inquired.

'Why,' answered the fellow, 'there'll be the beef ye had this morning, piccalillis, bottled stout, biscuit after this here pattern, and cold currant dumplings.'

He then went up the companion steps with some biscuit and tea for the captain. I laughed out.

'Not so good as the Indiaman's dinner-table, Miss Temple, but better than the hull's entertainment. We must wait till supper's served. Meanwhile, I'll blunt my appetite on a biscuit. Will you give me a cup of tea?'

It was genuine forecastle liquor, such as might have been boiled in a copper, of the hue of ink, and full of fragments of stalk. However, the mere looking at it was something to do, and we sat toying with our cups, making-pretend, as it were, to be drinking tea and talking.

'I wonder,' I exclaimed in the course of

our conversation, 'whether the cutter was picked up by one of the ships? If she lost both of them, will she have lived in the weather that followed? Anyway, the corvette is certain to make a long hunt for her, with the hope also of falling in with the Indiaman, for Sir Edward will think it possible that Keeling has his men aboard, and will want to make sure. I fear this business of the cutter may have led to such manœuvring on the part of the two ships as must render our falling-in with one or the other of them very unlikely.'

'Oh, why do you say that?' she cried.

'It is but a surmise,' said I; 'anyhow, I heartily hope the cutter *has* been picked up, if only for Colledge's sake. The sudden loss of the lieutenant will have dreadfully scared him.'

'I earnestly wish that Mr. Colledge may have been saved,' said she with a faint glitter of temper in her gaze; 'but I could wish ten times more earnestly that he had never been born, or that he had sailed in any other ship than the *Countess Ida*; for then I should not be here.'

'Your aunt endeavoured to dissuade you.'

'She did; and I am rightly served for not obeying her.'

'You are very high-spirited, Miss Temple; it is your nature, and you cannot help yourself. You are a young lady to insist upon having your own way, and you always get it.'

'Mr. Dugdale, you are too young to lecture me.'

'How old do you think I am?' said I.

'Oh, about six-and-twenty,' she answered with a slight incurious run of her eyes over me that recalled her manner in the Indiaman.

'Well, if I am,' said I, 'it is a good solid age to achieve. There is room for enough experiences in six-and-twenty years to enable a young man to utter several very truthful observations to high-spirited young ladies who insist upon having their way, and then quarrel with everybody because their way is not exactly the road they wish to tread.'

She slightly knitted her fair brows and looked at me fixedly.

'Mr. Dugdale,' said she, 'you would not have dared to talk to me like this on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'I was afraid of you there.'

'You *respected* me there, you mean, and

now—because'—— She came to a stop, with a little quivering at the extremities of her mouth.

'I am no longer afraid of you, or, rather, I no longer respect you because you happen to be in this particular situation, which needs no explanation whatever: that is, I suppose, what you wish to say. But you misjudge me indeed. I was afraid of you on board the Indiaman, but I did not respect you; nay, my aversion was as cordial as could be possibly imagined in a man who thought you then, as he thinks you still, the handsomest woman he has ever seen in his life, or could ever have dreamt of. But that aversion is passing,' I continued, watching with delight her marvellous gaze of astonishment and the warm flush that had overspread her face. 'I am discovering that much of what excited my dislike and regret aboard the Indiaman is artificial, an insincerity in you. This afternoon, whilst you slept, I sat near you for half an hour, gazing at you. All expression of haughtiness had faded from your mouth: your countenance wore an air of exquisite placidity, of gentle kindness, of tender good nature. In short, Miss Temple, I saw

you as you are, as your good angel knows you to be, as you have it in your power to appear.' I sprang to my feet. 'How shall we kill the blessed hours that lie before us? Only think, it is barely five o'clock.'

She gazed at me with an amazement that seemed to render her speechless; her face was on fire, and her throat blushed to where the collar of her dress circled it. 'It will not do,' I continued, 'to attempt to murder time by talking, or it will come to your killing me instead of the hours. I'll go and overhaul the late Mr. Chicken's bedroom, or, rather, his effects. There *may* be something to interest. Even the mouldiest backgammon board would be worth a million;' and I made for the little hatch that conducted to our sleeping berths, leaving her motionless at the table.

Come, thought I, as I dropped into the 'tween-decks, a short spell of loneliness will do you good, my haughty beauty, by making you realise how it would be with you were you actually alone. This is the first of the homely thrusts I have been preparing for you, and I will not spare you less as I grow to love you more, taking my chance of your abhorring me, though it may not come to *that* either.

I peeped into the berth that had been prepared for her, and found all the odds and ends which had encumbered it gone; there was a clean mattress on the bunk, and on top of it an old but comely rug and a couple of shawls; a small looking-glass dangled near the porthole. But what an interior for this delicately nurtured, high and mighty young lady of quality to lie in! No carpet, no chest of drawers, nothing beyond the looking-glass and a tin dish for washing in; in short, a mere marine cell, as like as might be to any little whitewashed room with grated window ashore in which a policeman would lock up a pickpocket!

I entered my own berth. The boatswain's and sailmaker's stores were not here, and I found a 'clean hold,' as a sailor might say. In fact, all Chicken's traps being about, caused the berth to present a much more hospitable aspect than the adjacent one afforded. I examined the books, but found most of them to consist of religious literature, as the captain had said, and the rest of them works on the nautical life. Though it was hard to reconcile a fancy of cards with the late Mr. Chicken's character as portrayed by the skipper, I yet

looked into a couple of chests in the hope of meeting with a pack; but neither cards nor any species of object calculated to divert did I come across; and growing weary of hunting, I returned to the cuddy.

I perceived or imagined an air of reproach in Miss Temple; but she had mastered her temper and astonishment.

'There is nothing belonging to the late Mr. Chicken to entertain us,' said I.

'It surely does not signify, Mr. Dugdale. Do you suppose that I have the heart to play at cards or chess? Is not there more wind than there was? I will ask you to take me on deck. Something may be in sight, and it will not be dark for some time yet.'

I gave her my hand, and helped her up the little ladder. There was more wind, as she had said; the skysails had been furled and a studding-sail or two hauled down, and the little barque, with her yards almost square, was sweeping swiftly over the smooth waters, slightly heeling from side to side as she went. The foam in yeasty bubbles and soft cream-hued clouds went spinning and writhing from her bows into her wake, that ran like a path

of coral sand over the darkling waters, now complexioned into lividness by the gloomy plain of vaporous sky. The crew were on the forecastle—it was well into the first dog-watch—lounging, sitting, yarning, and smoking. Amidst them I noticed Mr. Lush, leaning against the rail with a short sooty pipe in his mouth, the bowl of which was inverted. He was in his shirt sleeves, and he reclined with his arms folded upon his breast, apparently listening, in that dogged posture, to one of the sailors, who was reciting something with outstretched arm and a long forefinger, with which he seemed to be figuring diagrams upon the air. Upon the slope of the starboard cathead, coming into the deck, sat my friend Joe Wetherly, with a pair of thick-rimmed spectacles on his nose; he pored on a book with moving lips, from which he would expel at intervals great clouds of smoke through a pipe betwixt his teeth. So small was the barque, so seemingly close at hand the forecastle to the break of the poop, that even such minute details as these were perfectly visible to me.

Captain Braine stood near the wheel. He continuously stared at us, but did not shift

his attitude nor offer to address us. I swept the sea-line, but to no purpose.

'How sickeningly wearisome has that bare horizon grown to me!' exclaimed Miss Temple, with a shuddering sigh; 'it has just the sort of monotony that would speedily drive me crazy, I am sure; not the wearisomeness of four walls, nor the tiresomeness of a single eternal glimpse of unchanging country to be had through a window; no! there is a mockery in it which you do not find in the most insipid, colourless scene on land. It is not, and still it always *is*, the same. It recedes to your pursuit, yet it is unalterable, and how cruelly barren is it of suggestions!'

'Yet a sight of the Indiaman,' said I, 'should develop whatever of the picturesque may be hidden in that tiresome girdle.'

'Ah, yes!' she answered; 'but we are now running away from our chances. How swiftly this boat sails! If the Indiaman is behind us, we shall see no more of her.'

'Do not let us depress each other with talk of this kind,' said I; 'let me give you my arm, and we will stroll a little.'

We had been on deck about twenty minutes, when the captain, who had continued

to steadfastly gaze at us in a most extraordinary ruminating way, crossed the deck.

'Pray, sir,' said he, 'could I trust you to keep a lookout for me if I went below for a short spell?'

'I will do so with pleasure.'

'D'ye know what orders to give, if anything requiring orders should happen?'

'Why,' said I, smiling, 'there are a good many orders going at sea, you know, captain. Figure a situation, and I will see if I can recollect the routine.'

He stared at me musingly with his dead black eyes, and then said: 'Well, suppose the breeze freshens with a dark look to wind'ard, and I'm below and asleep, and have left ye no instructions; what would you do?'

'Call you,' said I.

'And quite right, too,' he cried, with a vehement nod of approval, and a glance at Miss Temple, as if he would have her participate in his satisfaction. 'But put me out of the question, and allow that you've got to act for yourself.'

'Why, Captain Braine,' I exclaimed, 'though my time at sea was brief, I am no longshoreman. Such a question as yours

means merely the first letter in the marine alphabet.'

'I ain't so sure of that,' said he, with his fixed regard.

'I admit,' continued I, 'that I have never been shipmate with a fore-and-aft rigged mizzenmast; but if it's merely a question of shortening sail, why, what else under the moon is to be done than to take in your studdingsails and clew up your royals and haul down your flying jib, and then let go your foretopgallant halliards, and haul down your light staysails'—and so I rambled on, winding up with, 'I am leaving your after-canvas untouched, because it is already in, you see; whilst as to your jibs and staysails, I assume of course that they are set.'

He lifted his hand. 'Thank'ee,' said he; 'I shan't be long;' and down he went.

'You will surely believe *now* that he is mad!' said Miss Temple with anxiety, but softly, for the fellow at the wheel stood near, and I had seen a grin crumple up his features to the skipper's question.

'He may want me to serve him as a mate,' said I, laughing.

'You will do nothing of the kind, I hope,'

she exclaimed, as we fell to pacing the deck afresh.

'I will do anything that may help me to see you safe,' said I.

'But cannot you perceive, Mr. Dugdale, that if he believes you fit to serve him as a mate, as you call it, he may prevent you from leaving his ship by declining to communicate with passing vessels?'

'That is true,' said I.

'I am certain,' she cried, squeezing my arm in the energy of her emotion, 'that he has some design in his mind to make you serve him. Why should he have teased you when we came, poor miserable creatures! fresh from the wreck, with inquiries about your knowledge of navigation? Oh, beware of him! He may not be quite mad, but he may be as wicked as the worst of his men.'

'We must wait,' said I, for her conjectures were quite reasonable enough to prove disturbing. 'But after all,' I cried, brightening up to the new idea that possessed me, 'if we are to sail to the Mauritius with him'——

'No!' she exclaimed; 'that is not to be dreamt of.'

'Yet listen, I entreat you. If it is our un-

comfortable doom to remain in this barque until she reaches her port, I do not know but that the captain would be very honestly in the right in expecting me to work my passage—that is to say, to help him by keeping a look-out, and by serving him in other ways which may be possible to me.'

'Do not dream of sailing to the Mauritius!' she cried impetuously; 'we must either soon meet with the Indiaman or return home.'

I could not forbear a smile at her imperious *we*, as though whatever she did I must do.

'Ay, that is what we want,' I exclaimed; 'but then if we don't fall in with the Indiaman nor with a vessel homeward bound'——

'Absurd! Dozens of ships are to be met with every day sailing home to England from some part or other of the world. The idea of remaining in this vessel is not to be entertained for an instant. It would be intolerable enough for me even to make the comparatively short passage home, destitute as I am of everything; but to leisurely proceed *all* the way to the Mauritius—— Oh, be very careful, Mr. Dugdale. I beg you not to know anything at all about navigation and the duties of a sailor.'

'I can't do that,' I answered; 'I have

loaded my gun and must stick to it; but I promise you I will put no more shot in it.'

She eyed me with great impatience and warmth, as though provoked by my answer: but she held her peace, and presently our conversation went to other matters.

Shortly before six o'clock the sky cleared somewhat to windward. The wide pall of leaden cloud lifted there, as though it were some huge carpet a corner of which was being rolled up, and there looked to flow a very lagoon of pure blue ether, moist and rich with the evening shadow, into the space betwixt the rim of the sea and the edge of the cloud. A clearer, more penetrating light broadened out; and going to the companion hatch, I took the telescope that lay in brackets there and carefully searched the horizon. But the sea washed bare to the sky on all sides.

I did not observe that the men gathered together on the forecastle seemed to notice the captain's absence, though I expected they would come to stare a bit when the fellow who stood at the wheel should go forward and tell them that I had been acting as mate of the watch. For my part this queer duty coming upon me made the whole experience more wild

and improbable to my imagination than had been any other feature of it since we quitted the Indiaman. Never was there such a forcing of adventures, as it were, upon a man. It was like dreaming to reflect that a little time ago I was a passenger, an easy-going, smoking, drinking, chess-playing young fellow, without a care, with plenty of clothes and money enough in my cabin, and that now I was a half-starved, shipwrecked wretch, without the value of a straw in the shape of possessions, outside of what I stood up in and had in my pockets, keeping a lookout as though, faith, I was some poor, struggling, hungry second mate, newly enlarged from an odious term of apprenticeship! like dreaming, I say, to think that a little time ago the young lady by my side was a reserved, disdainful creature, with scarcely a word betwixt her lips to throw at me, and that now she could not speak of her future without making me a sharer in it, that she could not see enough of me, nor have my arm too close for her hand; whilst in point of destitution she, the most richly clad of the Indiaman's lady passengers, she, who had seemed to me to appear in a new dress nearly every day, was out and away more beggared

than I; for so far as I was concerned there was always the barque's slop chest to come upon; or, failing that, there would be jackets and breeches and 'housewives' enough forward to serve my turn if the push grew severe; whereas Miss Temple was as badly off as if she had been cast away upon a desert island!

CHAPTER XXVI

I AM QUESTIONED

The captain did not again return on deck. At six o'clock Mr. Lush's white jacket was forked up to him through the forecastle hatch: he slipped it on and came aft to relieve the watch; but though he looked about a little for the skipper, I could not find in his wooden face that he made anything of not perceiving him. By seven o'clock the sky had cleared; the wide stretch of vapour which had all day long obscured the sky had settled away down beyond the southern rim, and the soft violet of the tropic evening heaven was made beautiful by spaces at wide intervals of a delicate filigree-work of white cloud, dainty and fine to the eye as frost on a meadow. The setting sun glowed in the west like a golden target, rayless, palpitating, and a cone-shaped wake of flame hung under him. There was a pleasant whipping of wind over the sea, a

merry air that whitened the heads of the ripples, and it blew sweet and warm.

Lush had loosed the skysails again and sent the royal studdingsails up, and the barque went nimbly floating through it in the resemblance of some golden-tinctured fabric of silver hull and sails of cloth of silver; indeed, from the point of view of the space of deck abaft the wheel, she showed like some fairy creation in that atmosphere that was brimful of scarlet light, and upon that sapphire plain whose tender long-drawn undulations seemed to wave a faint golden hue through the blue of the brine, as though there were dyes of a westering sun-colour rising from the heart of the deep, and then subsiding.

On looking through the skylight I perceived Wilkins placing supper on the table. This was an unusual meal at sea, at least aboard of a homely trader of the pattern of the *Lady Blanche*, and was a distinct illustration in its way, to my recollections of seafaring life, of the odd character of the man who commanded the barque. He came out of his cabin as we seated ourselves, giving Miss Temple a grotesque bow before taking his place.

'Sorry, mem,' said he, casting his slow eye over the table, 'that there's nothing choicer in the way of victuals to offer you. I find that the wine brought aboard from the wreck is a middling good quality of liquor, and it is to be saved for you, mem. Wilkins, open a bottle, and give it to the lady. Pity that shore-going folks who take interest in the nautical calling don't turn to and invent something better for the likes of me than salt pork and beef and biscuit, and peas which are only fit to load a blunderbuss with. There have been times when a singular longing's come upon me for a cut of prime sirloin and a floury potato, as Jack says. But the sea-life's a hard calling, look at it from which end of the ship ye may. How did you get on in your watch on deck, Mr. Dugdale?' he added with a gaunt smile, in which I could not distinguish the least complexion of mirth.

'There was nothing to be done,' said I, working away at a piece of salt beef, for I was exceedingly hungry.

'But ye'd have known what to do if there had been?' said he.

Miss Temple's glance admonished me to be wary.

'Oh, I am no sailor,' said I, 'in the sense that you and Mr. Lush are sailors.'

'Not Mr. Lush!' he cried, elevating his fore-finger and staring hard at me past it. 'Mr. Lush, as you term him, is a hog on two legs. Let him go on all fours, and there's ne'er an old sow under a longboat that wouldn't take him to her heart as one of her long-lost children. Such manners, mem!' he continued, addressing Miss Temple, whilst with upturned eyes and raised hands he counterfeited an air of disgust; 'when he ate, you could hear the smack of his lips fore and aft. He'd make nothing of laying hold of a bit of cold beef and gnawing upon it as a dawg might, head first on one side and then on t'other; and you'd find yourself listening to hear him growl, if you looked at him. And then his language! I've been eating by myself pretty nigh since Chicken died, but it's entertainment for me to have company;' and he bestowed another bow upon each of us.

'You will not find the manners of a nobleman in a plain ship's carpenter,' said I, thankful to believe that he had forgotten the subject of my sea-going qualifications. But I was mistaken. He gazed at me with a stead-

fastness that was absolutely confusing, whilst he seemed lost in deep thought, then said :

'I'm not going to regard you, Mr. Dugdale, as a tip-top sailor, of course. Ye've knocked off too long ; but it'll all come back very soon.'

'Mr. Dugdale was at sea for only two years,' said Miss Temple. 'It would be unreasonable to expect anyone to know much of a calling in that time.'

'Don't you believe *that*, mem,' he exclaimed. 'After twelve months of it, there was but little left for me to larn—proper, I mean, to fit me to sarve as able seaman aboard anything afloat, from a hoy to a line-of-battle ship. What don't ye know now, Mr. Dugdale ?'

He somewhat softened his voice as he said this, and a queer sort of yearning expression entered his unwinking stare.

'Oh, much, captain, much,' I answered smiling, yet feeling somewhat bothered betwixt these questions and Miss Temple's glances.

'You could put a ship about, I suppose.'

'Well, I might do that,' I replied ; 'but there would be a chance of my getting her into irons, though.'

'You'd be able to know when to shorten sail anyway, and what orders to give. You told me ye could take a star?'

'Did I?' I exclaimed.

'Certainly you did, sir,' he cried.

'I do not recollect,' said Miss Temple.

'Ha!' he exclaimed, with another of his mirthless grins, 'the lady's afraid of your knowing too much, sir. I don't mean no offence, but there's a forecastle saying that all the male monkeys 'ud talk if it wasn't for their sweethearts, who advise them to hold their jaw lest they should be put upon.'

Miss Temple's face changed into stone, after one withering glance at the man, whose countenance remained distorted with a smile.

'Some of Jack's sayings are first class,' he went on. 'Yes, ye told me you could take a star. Can you find the latitude by double altitudes?'

'A few trials would recall the trick, I daresay,' I answered.

'And of course you know how to find the longitude by lunar observations?'

'Pray excuse me, Captain Braine,' said I;

'but what, may I inquire, is your motive in asking these questions?'

He eyed me fixedly for some moments, and then silently nodded his head three or four times. Miss Temple seemed to shrink slightly as she watched him.

'Mr Dugdale,' said he very slowly, 'on your giving me to understand that you had sarved aboard an Indiaman, I was willing to receive you and the lady aboard my ship. When you came aboard, you told me that you understood navigation. Didn't ye?'

I felt the blood in my cheek as I answered: 'I have some recollection of speaking to that effect.'

'Then why d'ye want to go and try to make out *now* that ye know nothing about it?'

'I am trying to do nothing of the kind,' said I, assuming an air of dignity and resentment, though I feared it was good for very little. 'You have questioned me, sir, and now I ask *you* a question. I have a right to an answer, seeing how you expect that I should rapidly and fluently reply to you.'

'I'll be talking to you afore long,' he said, bestowing another succession of dark mysterious nods upon me.

'Captain Braine,' cried Miss Temple, breaking with an air of consternation out of the cold, contemptuous resentment that had made marble of her face, 'you have rescued us from a condition of dreadful distress, and I have your promise that you will not lose an opportunity to transfer us to the first ship you meet that is homeward bound, providing we do not shortly fall in with the *Countess Ida*.'

'I ha'n't broke my promise yet, have I?' he replied, rounding slowly upon her and staring.

'I can only repeat,' she continued, preserving her expression of dismay, 'that any sum of money you may choose to ask'——

'I know all about that, mem,' he interrupted, but not offensively, and with a gesture that was almost bland. He then leisurely turned to me. 'You gave me to believe this morning, sir, that you was acquainted with navigation?'

'And what then?' I exclaimed impatiently.

'I hope that you didn't deceive me,' he said with a dark look.

'You shall have the full truth when I know your motive in examining me in this fashion,' said I hotly, 'and not before.'

But immediately after I had spoken I was sensible of my folly in losing my temper. Talk as we might, vapour as we would, we were in this man's power: in the power of a man who was absolutely unintelligible as a character whether sane or mad, and the girl's and my own safety might wholly depend upon our judgment and tact. He gazed at me with eyes whose expression seemed to grow more and more malignant, though, God knows, this might have been my fancy, since I was in the humour at the moment to figure all things very blackly.

'Understand me,' I exclaimed, wholly changing my manner, and speaking in a softened tone; 'if I can be of service to you in any direction, you have but to command me. I owe you my own and this lady's life; and though it is an obligation beyond my power of discharging in full, yet it must be my duty and happiness to diminish it in any direction I am equal to.'

'We will before long talk together, sir,' said he, and then fell silent, nor did he again open his lips during the seven or eight minutes in which we continued sitting together at that table.

I was exceedingly puzzled and troubled by what had passed. What did this captain mean by his dark mysterious nods, by his saying that he would talk to me presently, by his insistence in ascertaining the extent of my nautical knowledge? It was possible, indeed, that being the only navigator aboard his vessel, he might consider himself in serious need of some one to take his place if he should fall sick. But his behaviour was scarcely reconcilable with this plain clear want, and it seemed certain that there was more going to his speech and manner than the desire that I should fill the part of mate to him.

It was a fair, warm, delightful night, rich with stars, and soothing with the dew-sweetened wind that blew with steady freshness over the quarter, running the pale shape of the barque over the dark waters, as though she were some wreath of mist that must presently dissolve. Miss Temple and I, sometimes walking, sometimes sitting on the skylight, held to the deck till a late hour. She abhorred the thought of withdrawing to the cabin allotted to her; and short as my sleep had been since the hour of my quitting the

Indiaman's side, I was as little willing as she to quit the silence and coolness and beauty of the open night for the confinement of a small hot berth.

The captain had charge of the deck from eight to twelve; but he only once approached us to say that a lantern containing an end of candle had been placed in each of our berths; 'and I will ask you both,' he added, 'to mind your fire, for we're full up with dry light goods in the steerage.' He then returned to the side of the deck he had crossed from, and did not again offer to approach us.

You will suppose that the girl and I could talk of nothing but the captain's intentions, the probable condition of his intellect, and the like.

'He may refuse to part with me,' said I, 'and yet be perfectly willing to send you on board of the first homeward-bound ship we sight. What then, Miss Temple?'

'I could not travel alone. It is not endurable that such a man as Captain Braine should compel you, against your wishes, to remain with him! How could he do so? How could he compel you to take a star, as he calls it, whatever that may mean;

and to keep watch?' She sighed deeply. 'Alas! my language is fast becoming that of the common sailor. To think of me talking to you about taking a star and keeping watch!'

'And why not? Jack's is a noble tongue. Omit the oaths, and there is no dialect more swelling and poetic than that of the sea.'

'I detest it because it is forced upon me. An odious and dreadful experience obliges me to think and speak in it. Otherwise, I might rather like it. But tell me now, Mr. Dugdale, surely this captain could not compel you to remain with him?'

This led to a deal of talk. I did my utmost to reassure her; I exhorted her to bear in mind that whilst we were on board the barque, we were literally at the mercy of the skipper, who, down to the present moment, had certainly treated us with great humanity, though his behaviour and conversation in the main were undeniably of a lunatic sort. I bitterly condemned myself for losing my temper, and I entreated her to be patient, to control all resentment that the man might excite by purposed or involuntary insult, not to doubt that he would put her on board a ship proceeding

home, and to leave me to play a part of my own that should keep us together.

'For,' said I, 'since fate, cruel to you, but not to me, Miss Temple, has placed you so far in my keeping, I must be jealous of all interference down to the very termination of our adventure.'

'I wish for no other companion,' she exclaimed in a low voice; 'my mother will thank you, Mr. Dugdale.'

'And, please God, your mother shall,' said I, 'trifling as may be my claims upon her gratitude. But however my merits may turn out before we again sight Old England, I shall be abundantly satisfied if I believe that you think of me with more kindness than you did on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'Mr. Dugdale, I thought of no one on board the *Countess Ida*. But let us avoid that subject—you have already been very plain-spoken.'

She ceased. I made no answer, and for some time we paced the deck in silence, harking then back again to the old topic of the captain's intentions, the whereabouts of the Indiaman, and so on, and so on. By-and-by I looked at my watch; the dial-plate

showed clearly by the starlight. It was eleven o'clock; and as I looked the ship's bell rang out six chimes, which came floating down again in echoes out of the tremorless pallid concavities on high. Miss Temple was still most reluctant to leave the deck.

'I am thinking of Mr. Chicken,' she exclaimed.

'Chicken's ghost, like a hen's egg, is laid,' said I. 'Besides, what remains of him will be all about my bunk.'

'Oh for the Indiaman's saloon,' she cried, 'for my dear aunt, for old Captain Keeling! How welcome would be a sight of even the most intolerable of the passengers, say Mr. Johnson; even that horrid little creature with the eye-glass, Miss Hudson's admirer.'

'I fear I am tolerated for the same reason that would render Mr. Johnson endurable to you.'

'No!' she answered quickly and warmly; 'you are incessantly personal. I do not like it.'

'Suffer me to escort you to your cabin?'

She lingered yet, turning her face to the skies.

'How rich are those stars! Such lovely

jewels are never to be seen in the English heavens. Mark how the meteors score the dark spaces between the lights with scars and paths of diamond dust! Oh that some gigantic shadowy finger would shape itself up there pointing downwards, to let us know where the *Countess Ida* is.'

She rose from the skylight with a long tremulous sigh, and passed her hand through my arm that I might conduct her below. For an instant I hung in the wind.

'Why do you wait? I am now ready,' said she.

'I am debating within myself whether I should offer to stand watch to-night—the captain might expect me to do so.'

'I do believe you desire that I should think you as mad as he is,' she exclaimed, exerting pressure enough on my arm to start me towards the poop-ladder; 'you shall do nothing of the sort with my consent. If you wish to resume your old vocation, Mr. Dugdale, pray wait until this adventure is ended.'

'Anyway, we must bid him good-night,' said I; and with that I called out to him. He answered: 'Good-night, Mr. Dugdale; good-night to you, mem. If there's anything

a-missing which the *Lady Blanche* can supply let me know, and you shall have it.'

'You're extremely good, and we're very much obliged to you,' said I.

'Good-night, Captain Braine,' called Miss Temple in her rich voice; and down we went.

The cabin lamp showed a small light. Miss Temple waited here whilst I went below for one of the two lanterns which the captain had told me I should find in our berths. I was obliged to kindle a sulphur match, and I remember cursing the tardy operation of obtaining a light whilst I stood hammering away with flint and steel, injuring my knuckles, and wishing the tinder-box at the deuce. I found the lanterns, and left one alight in Miss Temple's cabin, and carried my own, also alight, into the cuddy. Miss Temple's eyes sparkled to the glare as I approached her, and her face might have been a spirit's for its whiteness in that faint illumination vexed with shadows as the lantern swayed to the light rolling of the barque.

'I wish I could sleep here,' said she.

'You will be equally comfortable below,' said I; 'and what is better, quite private.'

'Did you see any rats?'

'None.'

She took my arm with a firm clasp, and hardly seemed willing to release me at the hatch, though the aperture was too narrow to admit of our descending together. When we had gained the lower deck, she again seized my arm and stood staring and hearkening.'

'Oh, Mr. Dugdale,' she cried, 'it is very lonely down here!'

'Yes; but you are not alone. You must have courage. I would rather you should be next me than overhead next the captain.'

Yet, as I spoke, my heart was full of pity for her. It was indeed lonely, as she had said, with a sense of imprisonment besides, all that way down, thinking of where we stood, I mean, with reference to the poop. The stowed cases in the forepart seemed to stir as though to some internal throes to the weak light that swung in my hand; the atmosphere was charged with an unpleasant smell of cargo and the mingled fumes of a ship's hold; and there was something of the heat of an oven also in the air that felt to rest with a sort of weight upon the head, due perhaps to the fancy begotten by the nearness

of the upper deck or ceiling as you may term it. Small straining noises stole upon the ear from round about in stealthy notes, as though they were giants below moving warily. I say I was full of concern for the poor girl. Somehow the misery of her condition had not before affected me as it now did.

'It will not last long. It will be a thing of the past very shortly: meanwhile, keep up your heart, and trust me as your protector whilst God leaves me a hand to lift,' I exclaimed with a tenderness of which I was insensible until a little later on, when the tones of my voice recurred to me in memory.

She looked at me as though she were about to speak, yet said nothing; and releasing my arm, she stepped to her cabin door and peeped in.

'Is there anything I can do?' said I, keeping at a respectful distance.

She peered awhile, and then answered: 'I think not. But that candle will not last long, and I shall be in darkness. Or if I should extinguish it, how am I to light it again?'

'If you want a light,' said I, 'knock on the bulkhead. I shall hear you, and will answer by knocking. But it already draws

on for twelve o'clock. The dawn will be breaking at five or thereabouts. I trust you will sleep. You greatly need rest.'

I removed my cap to kiss her hand, and met her gaze, that was fixed full of wistfulness upon me. 'Good-night, Miss Temple,' said I. She entered her cabin looking as though her heart was too full for speech, and closed the door.

I was now feeling exceedingly weary, yet, as I feared that she might need me, or, in some nervous fit, knock if it were but to know that I was awake, I filled my pipe, got into Mr. Chicken's bunk, and sat smoking. I cannot express the peculiar character of the stillness down here. It was very extraordinarily accentuated by the sounds which at intervals penetrated it: such as the muffled jar of the rudder working upon its post, the dim wash of water, startlingly close at hand, along with the faint seething noise of the barque's wake hissing within arm's reach, as it seemed, and coming and going upon the hearing fitfully. The suit of oilskins against the bulkhead swayed to the heave of the fabric, and they resembled the body of a man who had hanged himself by the nail from which they dangled.

There was a pair of sea-boots up in a corner with a dropsical bulging out about the foot of them in the part where a man's bunions would come, and they showed so very much as if they had just been drawn off the legs of Mr. Chicken, that they grew ghastly presently, and to relieve my imagination, I directed my eyes at other objects.

I sat smoking and full of thought. My eyelids were as of lead, yet my mind continued impertinently active. The horrors we had escaped from lay like the shadow of a thunder-cloud upon my spirits; the oppression was too violent to suffer the continuance of any emotion of exultation over our deliverance. Dark and dismal fancies possessed me. I thought of Captain Braine as a man whose reason was unsound, and who was capable of playing me some devilish trick; I thought of the coarse and surly carpenter, and of the charge of murder hinted against him by the skipper. I thought of the convicts and of the mutineer in the forecastle, and then my raven-like imagination going to Miss Temple, I reflected that I was unarmed, that I had no weapon about me but a knife, that must prove of very little use should it come to my having to make

a fight of it for hers and my own life. Surely, I mused, old Chicken will not have come to sea without some instrument of self-defence, be it blunderbuss, pistol, or cutlass.

I took an earnest view of the interior. There was a locker against the bulkhead that divided Miss Temple's cabin from mine; I had incuriously opened and looked into it when searching for something to divert ourselves with, being by the time I had come to that locker too tired to continue overhauling the dead man's effects. Besides this receptacle there were two chests of clothes and other matters along with a bagful of things, and a shelf over the bunk filled with odds and ends. There was still about an hour of candle-light in the lantern. I raised the lid of the locker, and found within a truly miscellaneous 'raffle' of objects, as a sailor would term it: charts, slippers, sextant in case, a number of tobacco pipes, bundles of papers, and I know not what besides. At the bottom, in the left-hand corner, was a small canvas bag very weighty for its size. I drew it out, and found about forty pounds in gold inside it, with three Australian one-pound notes, dark with thumbing and pocketing, and a five-pound note

scarcely distinguishable for dirt and creases. I replaced the bag; and coming to the other end of the locker, working my way to it through a very rag-and-bottle shop of queer gatherings, I met with the object that I was longing for: to wit, a heavy, long, double-barrelled pistol, with a couple of nipples and a ramrod, and a butt massive enough to bring an ox to earth with. There were a parcel of bullets, and a small brown powder-flask full in the piece of canvas in which the pistol was wrapped; but for some time I could not find any caps. Without them, the pistol would not be of the least use, and my satisfaction yielded to mortification as I continued to probe into the locker without result. I was about to abandon the quest in despair, when my fingers touched a circular metal box like to those which used to contain paste for the polishing of boots; I fished it up, and was mighty glad to find it filled with caps. Come, thought I, if difficulties are to happen, I am better off now than I was half an hour ago, anyhow.

All this time there had been no noise next door, and I could but hope that Miss Temple was sleeping. I carefully put the pistol and its little furniture into the foot of my bunk,

and pulling off my coat and waistcoat, and removing my shoes, I vaulted on to Mr. Chicken's mattress, blew out the candle in the lantern and stretched my length. It was hard upon two o'clock, however, before I fell asleep. The scuttle or porthole was abreast of the bunk, and the black disc of it framed the low-lying stars of the horizon as they slided up and down to the lift and fall of the hull. My thoughts went out to the great dark ocean, and shivers chased me, hot as the cabin was, as I lay reflecting upon the fire and explosion of the wreck, and upon how it would have been with us if Captain Braine, having taken a view of the hull, had proceeded and left us to our fate. The noises which violated the singular stillness down in that part of the ship where we lay, and which had rendered me somewhat uneasy at first, now proved lulling as I lay hearkening to them, growing drowsier and drowsier. There was a slumberous monotony in the creaking and jarring of the rudder, something soothing in the dim hissing of the wake dying out, and then seething afresh like the noise of champagne in a glass held to the ear, as the frame of the barque slightly soared and sank in delicate floating

movements upon the under-run of the dark swell. Perhaps by this time to-morrow we may be aboard a ship homeward-bound, I remember thinking: and that was the last of my thoughts that night, for I immediately afterwards sank into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRIG'S LONGBOAT

I WAS awakened by a knocking at the door. The little cabin was bright with sunshine, that was flashing off sea and sky upon the thick glass of the scuttle. 'Hallo!' I cried, 'who is that?' The voice of the young fellow Wilkins responded:

'Capt'n Braine's compliments, sir, and he'd be glad to know if there's anything you or the lady wants which it's in his power to supply ye with?'

I got out of the bunk and opened the door.

'Captain Braine is very kind,' said I to the veal-faced youth, who stood staring at me with faint eyes under his white lashes and brows. 'What time is it, Wilkins?'

'Half-past eight, sir,' he answered.

I knocked upon the bulkhead. 'Are you awake, Miss Temple?'

'Oh yes,' she answered, her voice sounding weak through the partition.

'Captain Braine wishes to know if you are in want of anything it is in his power to let you have?'

'There are many things I want,' she exclaimed; 'but they are not to be had, I fear. I am afraid I shall have to use that comb. I can do nothing with my hair, Mr. Dugdale.'

'All right, Wilkins,' said I; 'we shall be on deck in a few minutes.' He went away.

I found the comb that had belonged to Mr. Chicken on a shelf, and knocked on Miss Temple's door. She opened it, and an arm of snow, of faultless shape, was projected to receive the comb. 'Thank you,' said she, whipping the door to, and I entered my cabin, calling out that I would wait for her there till she was ready.

Happily, in respect of toilet conveniences we were not wholly destitute. The water in my can was indeed salt, but I contrived to get some show of lather out of the fragment of marine soap which I found inside of the tin dish that served me as a wash-basin. I was without Miss Temple's scrupulosity, and found old Chicken's hairbrush good enough to

flourish. There was a little parcel of razors, too, on the shelf where the comb had been, and with one of them I made shift to scrape my cheeks into some sort of smoothness, wholly by dint of feeling, for Miss Temple had Chicken's glass, and there was nothing in my cabin to reflect my countenance. By the time this little business was ended, and I had carefully concealed the pistol and powder-flask, Miss Temple was ready. She knocked on my door, and I stepped out.

I could see her but very imperfectly in the dim light of that steerage, yet it seemed to me that there was more vivacity in her eyes, more life in her carriage and air, than I had witnessed in her on the yesterday. She told me that she had slept soundly, and that her mattress was as comfortable as her bed aboard the *Countess Ida*.

'I am heartily glad to hear that,' said I. 'You found the marine soap tough, I fear?'

'It cannot be good for the complexion, I should think,' said she with a slight smile.

'How shocking,' I exclaimed, as we moved to the hatch, 'would such a situation as yours be to a young lady who is dependent for her beauty on cosmetics and powder! How

would Miss Hudson manage if she were here, I wonder?'

'Is there anything in sight, do you know, Mr. Dugdale? That is a more important subject to me than complexions.'

'I did not ask; but we will find out.'

It was a brilliant morning, a wide blue, blinding flash of day, as it seemed to my eyes after the gloom below. The sea was all on fire under the sun, and the wind held it trembling gloriously. A hot and sparkling breeze in the same old quarter gushed freshly into the wide expanded wings of the *Lady Blanche*, whose swift pace over the smooth plain of ocean seemed a sort of miracle of sailing to me when I contrasted it with the rate of going of the *Countess Ida*. The flying-fish in scores sparkled out from the barque's white sides. The foam came along her sheathing like a roll of cotton-wool to her wake. The ocean line ran round in a firm edge with an opalescent clarification of the extreme rim that gave the far-off confines a look of crystal.

But I had not stood longer than a minute gazing around me when I spied a gleam of canvas about a point on our weather-bow. I

saw it under the curve of the forecourse that lay plain in sight under the lifted clew of the mainsail.

'A sail, Miss Temple.'

'Where?' she cried, with her manner full of fever on the instant. I pointed. 'Oh,' she exclaimed, bringing her hands together, 'if it should be the Indiaman!'

But the captain was walking aft, and it was time to salute him.

'Good morning, sir,' I said as I approached him with Miss Temple at my side. 'We have paused a moment to admire this very beautiful morning. I perceive a sail right ahead, captain.'

It was a part of his destiny, I suppose, that he should stare hard at those who accosted him before answering. He carried his unwinking dead black eye from my companion to me, and then stepped out of the shell of his mood of meditation as a bird might be hatched.

'Hope you slept pretty comfortably?'

'Yes; I passed a good night; and I am happy to know that Miss Temple rested well.'

'Which way is that ship going?' cried the girl, whose cheeks were flushed with impatience.

'She is not a ship, mem,' he answered; 'she is seemingly a big boat that's blowing along the same road as ourselves under a lug.'

The telescope lay on the skylight, and I pointed it. Sure enough, the sail was no ship, as I had first imagined, though the white square hovering upon the horizon exactly resembled the canvas of a large craft slowly climbing up the sea. I could readily distinguish a boat, apparently a ship's longboat, running before the wind under a lugsail; but she was as yet too distant to enable me to make out the figures of people aboard, considerable as were the magnifying powers of the glass I levelled at her.

'Only a boat?' cried Miss Temple, in accents of keen disappointment.

'What will a craft of that sort be doing in the middle of this wide sea?' said I.

'She may have gone adrift, as you did,' answered Captain Braine.

'Is it imaginable that she should be the corvette's cutter?' cried Miss Temple, straining her fine eyes, impassioned with conflicting emotion, at the object ahead.

'Oh, no,' said I. 'First of all, the cutter had no sail; next, yonder boat is three or

four times bigger than she was; and then, even if she had a sail, I question if she could have run all this distance in the time from the spot she started from.'

I noticed whilst I spoke that Captain Braine watched me with a singular expression, and that his face slightly changed as to an emotion of relief when I had concluded my answer.

'The lady,' said he, 'is speaking of the man-of-war cutter that rowed ye aboard the wreck, and lost ye there?'

'Yes,' said I.

'How many of a crew?' he asked.

'Six men and a lieutenant; but the officer was drowned.'

He took the telescope from me, and brought it to bear upon the little sail over the bow, and kept it levelled for some moments. He then put the glass down and said: 'Have you had any breakfast?'

'Not yet,' I answered.

He called through the skylight to Wilkins, and told him to put some biscuit and tea and cold meat upon the table. 'I have made my meal,' said he, contriving one of his extraordinary bows as he addressed Miss Temple; 'and so, I hope, mem, you'll excuse my presence

below. Eat hearty, both of ye, I beg. There's no call to stint yourselves, and I'm sorry I can't put anything more tempting afore ye, as Jack says.'

We at once descended, both of us being anxious to get the meal, such as it might be, over.

'Why is he repeatedly saying, "as Jack says?"' asked Miss Temple.

'Ah!' I exclaimed, 'and why does he stare so? Yet, on my word, he seems an exceedingly good-natured fellow. I assure you we might have fallen into worse hands. No man could make a homeward-bound ship to rise up out of the sea or signal our whereabouts to the *Countess Ida* when she is leagues and leagues out of sight; but another captain might not have shown half the friendly concern this poor eccentric creature exhibits in our comfort.'

She agreed with me, but quickly dropped the subject as something distasteful, and spoke of her disappointment, and of the strangeness of meeting a small boat in the middle of such an ocean as we were sailing through. By some trick above my comprehension, she had contrived to smooth out her dress, insomuch

that a deal of its castaway aspect had left it. She had also manœuvred in some fashion with the feather in her hat; and I told her, as she sat opposite me, that she looked as fresh as though she had just left her cabin in the Indiaman.

'Youth must always triumph,' I said, 'if it be but fairly treated. Sleep has made your former self dominant again; but I will reserve all my compliments until I am able to pull my hat off to you ashore and say good-bye.'

She shot a glance at me under her long fringes, but held her peace.

The tea was so vile that I called to Wilkins, who stood on the quarter-deck, to procure us some coffee if there were any aboard; and in a few minutes he returned with a sailor's hook-pot full of it from the galley. This Miss Temple seemed able to sip without a face of aversion. It vexed me to see her imperilling her delicate white teeth with the hard fare that was sheer forecastle stuff, and bad at that; but it was not for me to give orders, nor was I willing to protract our sitting by inquiring if there was other food aboard. Besides, every hour in such weather as this might provide us with the opportunity we

hungered for, to escape into some homeward-bound ship with a cabin capable of affording endurable entertainment.

We rose from the table, and regained the deck. The moment my head showed above the companion-way, the captain called to me hastily. There was a look of disorder in his countenance that immediately excited my wonder; there was the alacrity of fear in his manner; he could address me now without a prolonged stare and his usual tardy emergence of mind.

'Please, take this glass,' said he, thrusting the telescope into my hand; 'and look at that there boat, and tell me what you think.'

The smooth, swift sliding of the *Lady Blanche* over the level surface of sea that was running in fire and foam lines to the brushing of the merry breeze and the sparkling of the soaring sun, had closed us rapidly with the boat ahead since Miss Temple and I left the deck. The little fabric was now scarcely more than a mile on the bow, and the captain's glass, when I put it to my eye, brought her as close to me as if she were no further off than our forecastle. She was a

large, carvel-built longboat; one of those round-bowed, broad-beamed structures which in the olden days used to stand in chocks betwixt a ship's foremast and galley, with often another boat stored inside of her, unless she was used to keep sheep or other live-stock in. She was deep in the water, and as much of her hull as was visible was of a dingy sallow white. She showed a broad square of dark old lug, before which she was running with some show of nimbleness. She seemed to be crowded with men, and even whilst I stood looking at her through the glass, I counted no less than twenty-seven persons. They were all looking our way, and though it was scarcely possible to define individual faces amid such a yellow huddle of countenances, I could yet manage to determine a prevailing piratic expression of the true sort, suggested not so much by the vagueness of swarthy cheek and shaggy brow as by the singularity of the fellows' apparel—the flapping sombrero, the red sash, the blue shirt, with other details —which but very faintly corresponded indeed with one's notion of the coarse homely attire of the merchant sailor.

Captain Braine's eyes were fixed upon me

as I turned to him. 'What do you think of her, sir?' said he.

'I don't like the look of those fellows at all,' I answered. 'I would not mind making a bet that they are a portion of the crew of the privateering brig from whose hull you rescued us yesterday morning.'

'Just the idea that occurred to me,' he cried. He levelled the glass again. 'A boatful of rascals, sir. Armed to the teeth, I daresay, and on the lookout for some such a vessel as mine to seize and get away back to their own waters in. And yet, it is awful, too, to think that the creatures may be in want of water. What's to be done? I can't allow them to board: and I'm not going to heave to, to give 'em a chance of doing so.'

'We're overhauling them fast,' said I. 'Best plan perhaps, captain, will be to hail them as we slide past and ascertain their wants, if we can understand their lingo; and if they need water, there's nothing to be done but to send some adrift for them to pick up. But for God's sake, sir, don't let them come aboard. They look as devilish a lot of cut-throats as ever I saw; and besides the safety

of our lives and of the ship, we have this lady to consider.'

Captain Braine listened to me with his eyes fixed upon the boat.

'She can't hook on at this,' said he, as if thinking aloud; 'we should tow her under water at such a pace. By heavens,' he shouted, with a wild look coming into his face, 'if she attempts to sheer alongside, I'll give her the stem!' and springing with the agility of a monkey upon the rail, he grasped a backstay, and stood in a posture for hailing the boat as we swept past.

Forward, the seamen had quitted the jobs they were upon, and were staring open-mouthed from the forecastle rail. I picked up the glass again to look at the crowd, and every face in the lens was now as distinct as Miss Temple's who stood beside me. An uglier, more ferocious-looking set of men never stepped the deck of a picaroon. I had not the least doubt whatever that they were a portion of the crew of the brig. Indeed, I seemed to have some recollection of the boat, for I remembered, whilst examining the brig from the poop of the Indiaman, that I had been struck by the unusual size of her long-

boat, and that the colour of her was the sallow pea-soup tint of the fabric yonder. There were several chocolate-coloured faces amongst the little crowd; here and there, a coal-black countenance with a frequent glitter of earrings and gleam of greasy ringlets. Many of them eyed us over the low gunwale under the sharp of their hands; one stood erect on the thwart through which the mast was stepped, clasping the spar with his arm, and apparently waiting to hail us. The steersman watched us continuously, and now and again the boat's head would slightly fall off to a sneaking movement of the helm, as though to some notion of edging down upon us without attracting our observation. But the barque's keen stem was ripping through the water as the jaws of a pair of shears drive through a length of sailcloth. I had no fear of the boat hooking on; she would have to manœuvre under our bows to do that, and it needed but a little twirl of the spokes of our wheel to drive her into staves and to send her people bobbing and drowning into our wake.

'Boat ahoy!' shouted the captain with such delivery of voice as I should have

thought impossible in so narrow shouldered a man.

'Yash! yash!' vociferated the fellow who clasped the mast, frantically brandishing his arms. 'Ve are sheepwreck—you veel take us —ve starve!'

The captain looked and hardly seemed to know what to say.

'How long have you been adrift?' he bawled.

The fellow, who wore a red nightcap, shook it till the tassel danced to the violent gestures of his head. He evidently did not understand the question. 'Take us!' he shrieked—'ve starve!'

The boat was now on the bow, within pistol-shot from the forecastle rail.

'Mind your helm, Captain Braine,' I suddenly shouted, 'or she'll be aboard you!' for my young and, in those days, keen eyes had marked the action of the fellow who steered the boat, and even as I bawled out, the head of the little fabric swept round with a fellow in the bows flourishing a boathook, to which was attached a length of line, and others standing by ready to help him when he should have hooked on.

'Steady as she goes!' cried Captain Braine.

'Oh Mr. Dugdale,' shrieked Miss Temple, 'they will get on board of us!'

The boat's head drove sheering alongside into our bow just forward of the fore-chain plates. I saw the fellow erect in her head fork out his boathook to catch hold.

'Let go!' roared a voice forward. The figure of Joe Wetherly overhung the rail, poising either an iron marline-spike or a belaying-pin, or some short bar of metal; this I saw. Then he hurled it at the moment that the boathook had caught a plate. The missile struck the man full on the head; he fell like a statue in the bottom of the boat, and the boat herself ground past us as the barque, to the impulse of her great overhanging squares of studdingsail, swept onwards at some seven or eight knots in the hour.

They were so crowded as to be in one another's road. I saw a dozen grimy paws extended to catch hold of the main-chain plates as the boat came bruising and groaning and washing past; but the iron bars were swept like smoke out of the wretches' frantic grip. Never shall I forget the picture the little

fabric offered in the swift glimpse I caught of her as she glided past. The crowd, in their desperate efforts to catch hold of the sweeping projections in the barque's side, squirmed and surged and rose and fell like rags of meat stirred up in a boiling stewpot. Their cries, their yells, their Spanish oaths, the brandishings of their arms, the fury expressed in their malignant faces, the sudden uprootal and crash of their one mast and sail by the fouling of it with our mainbrace, all combine into a memory which is not to be expressed in words. I caught sight of a number of breakers in the bottom of the boat along with some bags, and was instinctively assured that they were lacking in neither food nor water. As the boat sped under the rail on which Captain Braine was standing, the fellow who had been at her helm, a brawny mulatto in a wide straw-hat, loose red shirt, and naked feet, suddenly whipped a pistol out of his breast, took aim at the skipper, and fired; and then, in a breath or two, the craft was astern, tumbling in the seething white of our wake, lessening into a toy even as you looked, with half of her people getting the wreck of mast and rail inboard, and the rest of them furiously gesticulating at us.

Captain Braine stood on the rail watching them with an air of musing that was incredibly odd in the face of the wild excitement of the moment.

'Are you hurt?' I cried.

He turned slowly to survey me, then very leisurely dismounted from his perch, meanwhile continuing to gaze at me.

'No,' said he, after an interval during which I ran my eyes over him with anxiety, thinking to see blood or to behold him suddenly fall; 'it's all right. This is the fourth time I've been shot at in my life; and be my end what it will, it is certain I am not to perish by another man's bullet. Rogues all, ha!' he continued, directing his dead black vision at the boat astern; 'they would have carried the little *Blanche*, and slit our throats. Just the sort of ship, sir, for the likes of their trade: the heels of a racehorse and the sober look of the honest marchantman. Slit our throats; all saving *yours*, mem, I expect; but only to reserve ye for something worse than death to you, if your noble looks don't belie your taste.'

'They never could have held on with that boathook,' said I, struck more by the man's

manner than his speech, strange as *it* was. 'I suppose they hoped to cling long enough to chuck a few of their beauties aboard us. Well, Miss Temple, let us trust that we have now seen the very last of that confounded privateer brig and the gallant, good-looking chaps who stocked her.'

'When is all this going to end?' said she.

'Every man of them,' exclaimed the captain, 'will have had a firearm in his breast.'

'No doubt,' I answered; 'the vessel must have been handsomely furnished in that way to judge by what we found remaining in the cabin of the wreck.'

'Were they starving, d'ye think?' he exclaimed with a sudden troubled manner, as he looked at the speck in our wake.

'I should say not,' said I; 'there were breakers in the bottom of the boat, and parcels resembling bread bags aft.'

'Thirst is a fearful thing at sea, sir,' said he, slowly: 'it's worse than hunger. Hunger, whilst it remains appetite, is agreeable; but the first sensation of thirst is a torture. I have known 'em both—I have known 'em both,' he added, with a melancholy shake of

his head and a profound sigh; then bringing his unwinking stare to bear upon me, he exclaimed: 'Supposing that shot had taken effect, the *Lady Blanche* would now be without a master; and if you wasn't on board, she'd be without a navigator. Less than two sea-going heads to every ship *won't* do. I felt that truth when Chicken went, and I'm feeling of it every time I catch sight of that there man Lush.' Miss Temple and I exchanged glances. 'Well,' said he, with one of his mirthless grins, 'I don't expect those privateersmen 'll trouble us any more;' and in his abrupt way he walked to the compass, and stood there looking alternately from it to the canvas.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I QUESTION WETHERLY

It had now become so much one thing on top of another with us, and everything happening in a moment, so to speak, too: first our being left on the wreck all in a breath as it were: then our being picked up by this barque without the dimmest prospect, as my instincts advised me, of our falling in with the *Countess Ida* this side of Bombay: then our destitute condition aboard a craft whose skipper's sanity I was now honestly beginning to distrust, and whose people, if he did not lie, were for the most part a gang of scoundrels: then this sudden narrow shave of being boarded by above a score of miscreants whose undoubted hope was to seize the *Lady Blanche* and to use her in the room of their own extinguished brig; I say it was so much one thing on top of another—a catalogue of adventures scarcely conceivable in these safe-going days of the

ocean mailboat, though real enough and in one way or another frequent enough in my time, I mean in the time of this narrative—that I protest something of the dismay which possessed Miss Temple visited me, though I struggled hard in the direction of a composed face, as we talked over the incident of the morning, and took a view of the singular staring figure who had charge of the barque, and directed our eyes at the crew, all hands of whom hung about forward, briskly yarning, as I might suppose, about the Spanish long-boat's attempt (and with God knows what sympathy, I would think, as I peered at the groups), or as we sent our eager gaze into the blue and brilliant ocean distance in search of any little leaning flake of white that might flatter us with promise of escape from our disagreeable situation.

'I have fully and immovably formed my opinion on two points,' said Miss Temple to me as we continued to pace the deck together for some half hour after the boat had disappeared astern: 'one is, that Captain Braine is mad; and the other that he is firmly bent on making you serve him as his mate.'

'I own that I now believe he is madder

than I first suspected,' I answered. 'His manner and language to you just now were extraordinary. But as to his employing me as mate—I think this: if the man is crazy, he may easily go wrong in his navigation; if we sight nothing that will carry us home, we must obviously stick to the barque, and her safety, therefore, is ours; consequently, it is desirable, I think, that I should know what her skipper is doing with her from day to day; and this I can contrive by consenting to oblige him with taking sights.'

'I see what you mean,' she exclaimed thoughtfully. 'I had not taken that view; but it is a cruel one to entertain; it implies our remaining on board until—until—— Oh, Mr. Dugdale! this sort of imprisonment for the next two or three months is not to be borne.'

'Anyway,' said I, 'you now understand that our very safety demands we should know where that fellow is carrying his ship. If, then, he should request me to shoot the sun as we call it, you will not be vexed by my compliance?'

'Who am I, Mr. Dugdale, that you should trouble yourself about my opinion?'

'You can make yourself felt,' said I, smiling; 'I should consider your eyes matchless in their power to subdue. There is a little passage in Shakespeare that very exquisitely fits my theory of you.'

'I would rather not hear it,' she answered, with a slight curl of her lip and a faint tinge of rose in her cheeks. 'You once applied to me a sentence from Shakespeare that was very unflattering.'

'What was it?'

'You compared my complexion to the white death that one of Shakespeare's girls talks about.'

'I remember. I am astonished that your aunt should have repeated to you what she overheard by stealth.'

'I do not understand,' she exclaimed, firing up.

'She was behind me when I made that quotation, and I was unconscious of her presence. She should have respected my ignorance. I meant no wrong,' I went on, pretending to get into a passion. 'Your complexion is pale, and I sought to illustrate it to my little friend Saunders by an expression of striking nobility and beautiful dignity. If

ever I have the fortune to find myself in your aunt's company, I shall give her my mind on this business. How am I to know but that her repeating what she had heard me let fall excited in you the disgust I found in your treatment of me?'

She cooled down as I grew hot.

'The extravagance of your language shocks me,' she exclaimed, but with very little temper in her voice. 'Disgust? You have no right to use that word. You were always very courteous to me on board the *Countess Ida*.'

'Am I less so here?' said I, still preserving an air of indignation.

'Do not let us quarrel,' she said gently, with such a look of sweetness in her eyes as I should have thought their dark and glowing depths incapable of.

'If we quarrel, it will not be my fault,' said I, disguising myself with my voice, whilst I looked seawards that my face might not betray me.

At that moment the captain called out my name: 'Can I have a word with you, sir?' he cried along the short length of poop, standing as he was at the wheel, whilst we were

conversing at the fore-end of the raised deck.

'With pleasure,' I answered.

'I shall go into the cabin,' said Miss Temple; 'it is too hot here. You will come and tell me what he wants.'

I waited until she had descended the ladder, and then strolled over to the captain, determined to let him know by my careless air that whatever I did for him he must regard as an obligation, or as an expression of my gratitude; but that I was not to be commanded. I believed I could witness an expression of embarrassment in his fixed regard that I had not before noticed in him. He eyed me as though lost in thought, and I waited.

'Would you object,' said he, 'to ascertain our latitude at noon to-day?'

'Not in the least.'

He seemed to grow a little brighter. 'And I should feel obliged,' he continued, 'if you'd work out the longitude.'

'With pleasure,' I said. I looked at my watch. 'But I have no sextant.'

'I have a couple,' he exclaimed; 'I will

lend you one;' and down he went for it with a fluttered demeanour of eagerness.

I lingered till I supposed he had entered his cabin, then put my head into the skylight and called softly to Miss Temple, who was seated almost directly beneath for the air there: 'He wishes me to take an observation with him.'

'What is that?' she answered, also speaking softly and turning up her face.

'I am to shoot the sun—you know, Miss Temple.'

'Oh, pray, contrive to make some error—commit some blunder to make him suppose'—— She checked herself, and I heard the captain say that it was very hot as he came to the companion steps.

In a few moments he arrived on deck, hugging a brace of sextant cases to his heart. He told me to choose; I took the one nearest to me, perceived that the instrument was almost new, and as it was now hard upon the hour of noon, applied it to my eye, the captain standing alongside of me ogling the sun likewise. I could see the men forward, waiting for the skipper to make eight bells, staring their hardest at the now unusual spectacle to

them of two sextants at work. For my part, I should have been shocked by the weakness of my memory if I had not known what to do. During the two years I had spent at sea I was thoroughly grounded in navigation—such as it was in those days; and as I stood screwing the sun down to the horizon, the whole practice of the art, so far as my education in it went, came back to me as freshly as though I had been taking sights ever since.

We made eight bells. Mr. Lush came aft to relieve the deck, and I went below with Captain Braine to work out the barque's position.

I smiled at Miss Temple as I entered the cuddy; she watched me eagerly, and the movement of her lips seemed to say, 'Don't be long.' In fact, her face had that meaning; and I gave her a reassuring nod ere turning to follow the captain into his berth. The apartment was small and cheerful, plainly stocked with the customary details of a humble skipper's sea bedroom; a cot, a small table, a cushioned locker, a few mathematical instruments, a little hanging shelf of strictly nautical books, and so on. His chronometer was a good one, handsome for those days, of

a quality one would hardly expect to find in a little trading-barque of the pattern of this *Lady Blanche*. There was a bag of charts in a corner, and a small chart of the world lay half unrolled upon the table, with a bit of the Atlantic Ocean visible exhibiting the skipper's 'pricking' or tracing of his course down to the preceding day.

'Here's ink and paper, sir,' said he; 'sit ye down, and let's see if we can tally.'

I was always a tolerably quick hand at figures, and had soon completed my calculations, feeling as though I was at sea again in sober professional earnest. The captain worked with extraordinary gravity; his singular eyes overhung the paper without a wink, and his yellow countenance, with his blue chops and chin, wore the melancholy of a mute's face, mixed with an indefinable quality of distress, as though his mental efforts were putting him to physical pain. We agreed to a second in our latitude, but differed in our longitude by something over seven miles.

'You'll be in the right, sir—you'll be in the right!' he cried, smiting the table with his fist. 'It is clear you know the ropes, Mr.

Dugdale. I'll abide by your reckonings. And now I want ye to do me a further sarvice.'

'What is that, captain?' said I.

'Well, ye may reckon, of course, that I can write,' he answered; 'but I never was topweight with my pen, as Jack says, nor, for the matter of that, was Chicken much of a hand. There was some words which he was always making a foul hawse of. Now, what I want ye to do, Mr. Dugdale, is to keep my log for me.'

'All this,' said I carelessly, yet watching him with attention, 'is practically making a chief officer of me.' He did not answer. 'Of course, I don't object,' I continued, stimulated more perhaps by Miss Temple's than by my own views, 'to oblige in any possible manner a gentleman'——

'I am no gentleman,' said he, with a wave of the hand.

'—— to whom Miss Temple and myself owe our lives. But I may take it that it is thoroughly understood the young lady and myself are to quit your hospitable little ship at the first opportunity that may offer.'

He regarded me in silence for I should say at least a minute; I was positively beginning

to believe that he had fallen dumb. At last he seemed to come to life. He nodded slowly three times and said very deliberately: 'Mr. Dugdale, you and me will be having a talk later on.'

'But good God, captain,' cried I, startled out of my assumed manner of indifference or ease, 'you will at least assure me that you'll make no difficulty of transhipping us when the chance to do so occurs?'

He was again silent, all the while staring at me; and presently, in a deep voice, said, 'Later on, sir;' and with that stood up.

'How much later on?' I inquired.

He tapped his brow with his forefinger and answered: 'It needs reflection, and I must see my way clearly. So far it's all right. I'm much obliged to ye, I'm sure;' and he went to the door and held it open, closing it upon himself after I had stepped out.

At the instant I resolved to tell Miss Temple of what had passed; then swiftly thought no! it will only frighten the poor girl, and she cannot advise me; I must wait a little; and with a smiling face I seated myself by her side. But secretly, I was a good deal worried. I chatted lightly, told her that

there was nothing whatever significant in the captain's request that I should check his calculations by independent observations, and did my utmost, by a variety of cheerful small talk referring wholly to our situation, to keep her heart up. Nevertheless, secretly I was much bothered. The man had something on his mind of a dark mysterious nature, it seemed to me; and I could not question that it formed the motive of his interrogatories as to my seamanship, and of his testing my qualities as a navigator by putting a sextant into my hand. Whatever his secret might prove, was it likely to stand between us and our quitting this barque for something homeward bound? It was most intolerably certain that if Captain Braine chose to keep me aboard, I must remain with him. For how should I be able to get away? Suppose I took it upon myself to signal a vessel when he was below: the hailing, the noise of backing the yards, the clamour of the necessary manœuvring, would hardly fail to bring him on deck; and if he chose to order the men to keep all fast with the boat, there could be no help for it; he was captain, and the seamen would obey him.

These thoughts, however, I kept to myself. The day passed quietly. Again and again Miss Temple and I would search the waters for any sign of a ship; but I took notice that the barrenness of the ocean did not produce the same air of profound misery and dejection which I had witnessed in her yesterday. In fact, she had grown weary of complaining; she was beginning to understand the idleness of it. From time to time, though at long intervals, something fretful would escape her, some reference to the wretched discomfort of being without change of apparel; to the misfortune of having fallen in with a ship, whose forecastle people, if her captain was to be believed, were for the most part no better than the company of brigands whom we had scraped clear of that morning. But it seemed to me that she was slowly schooling herself to resignation, that she had formed a resolution to look with some spirit into the face of our difficulties, a posture of mind I was not a little thankful to behold in her, for, God knows, my own anxiety was heavy enough, and I did not want to add to it the sympathetic trouble her grief and despair caused me.

All day long the weather continued very glorious. The captain ordered a short awning to be spread over the poop, and Miss Temple and I sat in the shadow of it during the greater part of the afternoon. There was nothing to read; there was no sort of amusement to enable us to kill the time. Nevertheless, the hours drifted fleetly past in talk. Miss Temple was more communicative than she had ever before been; talked freely of her family, of her friends and acquaintances, of her visits abroad, and the like. She told me that she was never weary of riding, that her chief delight in life was to follow the hounds; and indeed she chatted so fluently on one thing and another that she appeared to forget our situation: a note almost of gaiety entered her voice; her dark eyes sparkled, and the cold, marble-like beauty of her face warmed to the memories which rose in her. I gathered from her conversation that she was the only living child of her mother, and that there was nothing between her and a very tolerable little fortune, as I might infer from her description of the home Lady Temple had kept up in her husband's life, and that she still, though in a diminished

degree, supported for the sake of her daughter, though she herself lay paralysed and helpless, looked after in Miss Temple's absence by a maiden sister.

I recollect wondering whilst I listened to her that so fine a woman as she, and a fortune to boot, had not long ago married. Was she waiting for some man with whom she could fall in love? or was it some large dream of title and estate that hindered her? or was it that she was without a heart? No, thought I; her heart will have had nothing to do with it. Your heartless girls get married as fast as the rest of them. And was she heartless? It was not easy to let one's gaze plumb the glowing liquid depths of her eyes, which seemed to my fancy to be charged with the fires of sensibility and passion, and believe her heartless.

There was something wild in the contrast betwixt the imaginations she raised in me by her talk of her home and her pleasures with her own beauty at hand to richly colour every fancy she inspired—betwixt my imagination, I say, and the realities about us, as I would most poignantly feel whenever I sent a glance at old Lush. He was a mule of a man, and

stood doggedly at a distance, never addressed nor offered, indeed, to approach us, though sometimes I would catch him taking me in from head to toe out of the corner of his surly eyes. Possibly, my showing that I had a trick of navigation above his knowledge excited his spleen ; or maybe his hatred of the captain led him to dislike me because of the apparent intimacy between the skipper and me. Anyway, I would catch myself looking at him now with a feeling of misgiving for which I could find no reason outside of the mere movement of my instincts.

It was in the second dog-watch that evening ; Miss Temple was resting in the little cuddy, and I stepped on to the main-deck to smoke a pipe. The topmost canvas of the barque delicately swayed under a cloudless heaven that was darkly, deeply, beautifully blue with the shadow of the coming night. A large star trembled above the ocean verge in the east ; but the glow of sunset still lingered in the west over a sea of wonderful smoothness rippling in frosty lines to the breeze that gushed from between the sunset and the north.

The carpenter had charge of the deck ; the

captain was in his cabin. Whilst I lighted my pipe, I caught sight of the man Joe Wetherly seated on the coaming of the fore-hatch past the little galley. He was puffing at an inch of dusky clay with his arms folded upon his breast, and his countenance composed into an air of sailorly meditation. This seemed an opportunity for me to learn what he had to tell or might be willing to impart about the inner life of the *Lady Blanche*, and I went along the deck in an easy saunter, as though it was my notion to measure the planks for an evening stroll. I started when abreast of him with a manner of pleased surprise.

'Oh! it is you, Wetherly? My old acquaintance Smallridge's friend! No sign of the Indiaman, though. I fear we have outrun her by leagues. And always when you are on the lookout for a sail at sea, nothing heaves into sight.'

He rose to my accost, and saluted me with a respectful sea-bow, that is, by scraping his forehead with his knuckle with a little kick back of his left leg.

'That's right enough, sir,' he answered. 'I've been sailing myself in a ship for six weeks

in middling busy waters, too, with ne'er a sight of anything—not so much as the tail of a gull.'

'Pray sit,' said I; 'I'll keep you company. This is the right spot for a smoke and a yarn; quiet and cool and out of the road of the poop.'

He grinned, and we seated ourselves side by side. I talked to him first about the *Countess Ida*, explained the circumstance of my being in company with Miss Temple, told him who she was, and spoke of her shipwrecked condition so far as her wardrobe went, and how eager she was to return to England; but the old sailor made very little of her being in want of a change of dress.

'There is no need, sir,' said he, 'for the lady to distress her mind with considerations of a shift o' vestments. I allow she can use a needle for herself; there's needles and thread at her sarvice forrads; and how much linnen do she want? Why one of the skipper's table-cloths 'ud fit her out, I should say.' He turned his figure-head of a face upon me as he added: 'Tain't the loss of clothes, sir, as should occupy her thoughts, but the feeling that she's been took off that there wreck and is safe.'

I fully agreed with him, with some inward laughter, wondering what Miss Temple would think if she had overheard his speech. One thing led to another; at last I said:

'Wetherly, I am going to ask you a plain question; it is one sailor making inquiry of another, and you'll accept me as a shipmate, I know.' He nodded. 'Is not your captain wanting?' and I touched my head.

'Well,' he answered after a pause, '*I* think so, and I've been a-thinking so pretty nigh ever since I've been along with him.'

'What caused his mate's death?'

'He died in a swound,' he answered—'fell dead alongside the wheel as he was looking into the compass.'

'Have the sailors noticed anything queer in their captain?'

'They're such a party of ignorant scow-bankers,' said he, with a slow look round, to make sure that the coast was clear, 'that I don't believe they're capable of noticing anything if it ain't a pannikin of rum shoved under their noses.'

'I don't mind whispering to you,' said I, 'that the captain hinted to me they were not a very reputable body of men—talked vaguely

of mutineers and convicts, with one fellow amongst them,' I went on, bating my voice to a mere whisper, 'who had committed a murder.'

He stared at me a moment, and then tilted his cap over his nose to scratch the back of his head.

'He'll know more about 'em, then, than I do,' he responded; 'they're ignorant enough to do wrong without troubling themselves much to think of the job when it was over. Mutineering I don't doubt some of 'em have practised. As to others of 'em being convicts, why who's to tell? Likely as not, says I. But when it comes to murder—a middling serious charge, ain't it, sir? Of course I dunno—who might the party be, sir?'

'Oh!' I exclaimed, 'it was a vague sort of talk, as I told you. But if Miss Temple and I are to stick to this ship till we get to the Mauritius, it would comfort her, and me, too, for the matter of that, to learn that her crew are not the band of ruffians we have been led to imagine them.'

'Well, sir,' he exclaimed thoughtfully—'I'm sure you'll forgive me, but I don't rightly recollect your name.'

'Dugdale.'

'Well, Mr. Dugdale, as you asks for my opinion, I'll give it ye. Of course, it'll go no furder, as between man and man.'

'Certainly not. I am myself trusting you up to the hilt, as what I have said must assure you. You may speak in perfect confidence.'

He cast a cautious look round: 'There's but one man to be regularly afeerd of, and that's Mr. Lush. I believe he'd knife the capt'n right off if so be as he could be sure we men wouldn't round upon him. I don't mean to say he han't got cause to hate the capt'n. He's a working man without knowledge of perlite customs, and I believe the capt'n's said more to him than he ought to have said; more than any gen'leman would have dreamt of saying, and all because this here carpenter han't got the art o' dining in a way to please the eye. But this here Mr. Lush feels it too much: he's allowed it to eat into his mind; and if so be there should come a difficulty, the capt'n wouldn't find a friend in him, and so I tells ye, sir. I don't want to say more n's necessary and proper to this here occasion of your questions; but though the crew's a

desperate ignorant one, ne'er a man among 'em capable of writing or spelling any more'n the carpenter hisself, there's only *him* to be afeerd of, so far as I'm capable of disarning; though, of course, if he should tarn to and try and work up their feelings, there's naturally no telling how the sailors 'ud show.'

'They seem a pretty smart set of fellows,' said I, finding but little comfort to be got out of this long-winded delivery; 'the ship is beautifully clean, and everything looks to be going straight aboard of you.'

'Oh! every man can do his bit,' he answered; 'but if I was you, sir, being in charge, as you are, of a beautiful young lady, for the likes of which this here little barque, with nothen but men aboard and such shabby food as goes aft, is no proper place—if I was you, I says, says I, I'd get away as soon as ever I could.'

I mentally bestowed a few sea-blessings on the head of this marine Job's comforter, but contrived, nevertheless, to look as though I was much obliged to him for his information and advice; and after we had continued discoursing on a variety of nautical topics for

some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour longer, I proceeded aft, and spent the rest of the evening in conversing with Miss Temple in the cabin or in walking the deck with her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

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